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# ABSTRACT

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: A CRITICAL REALIST COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLAND AND SPAIN

María Inés Martínez Herrero

Social work's emergence and historical evolution has been intertwined with evolving notions of human rights (HR) and social justice (SJ). These two principles permeate definitions of social work and codes of ethics for social work across the world, and the Global Standards for social work education promote human rights and social justice as unifying themes of the profession. Yet there is little understanding of how these themes are represented and transmitted to social work students in specific national contexts.

This thesis explores understandings of HR and SJ among social work educators and the mechanisms used to transmit HR and SJ to social work students in two contrasting European countries, England and Spain. Using a critical realist framework, a web survey of social work educators and students was followed by qualitative interviews with educators in each country to identify opportunities and challenges in engaging with theories and practice implications of this HR and SJ based profession.

The findings show that neoliberal ideology, which increasingly pervades higher education institutions and social work agencies in both England and Spain, places pressure on social work educators to convey narrow understandings of HR and SJ and adopt increasingly bureaucratic and distant relationships with students. The thesis brings to the fore the challenges experienced by social work educators and students in each country engaging with HR and SJ in social work curricula. But it also identifies key spaces for the promotion of a HR and SJ based social work and examples of resistance to neoliberal ideology in social work education.

The thesis concludes that social work education at university degree level remains a fertile site for the deconstruction of, and development of resistance to, neoliberal ideology that threatens the HR and SJ basis of the social work profession.

**Human rights and social justice in  
social work education:  
*A critical realist comparative study  
of England and Spain.***

María Inés Martínez Herrero

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APSW	Association of Professors of Social Work ... 94	IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers ..... 17
C.O.S	Charity Organisations Society ..... 40	JUCSWEC	Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee ..... 94
CCETSW	Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work..... 83	NASW	American National Association of Social Workers..... 64
CGTS	<i>Consejo General de Trabajo Social</i> ..... 59	PCF	Professional Capabilities Framework ..... 89
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission 20	SJ	Social Justice..... 1
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council 114	SWAN	Social Work Action Network ..... 22
GSCC	General Social Care Council..... 86	TOPPS	Training Organisation of Personal Services ..... 86
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council ..... 86	UK	United Kingdom ..... 18
HEI	Higher Education Institution ..... 118	UN	United Nations ..... 31
HR	Human Rights ..... 1	UNDHR	United Nations Declaration of Human Rights..... 20
IASSW	International Association of Schools of Social Work..... 22	US/USA	United States..... 19
ICSW	International Council of Social Welfare . 22		

# STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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I am grateful for having been part of the **Durham SASS community**, where there are many people I admire and who have contributed (often subtly but importantly) to my success with this research. Whilst being part of SASS, and thanks to it, I have discovered what I really want to do in life (social work teaching and research), gained friends for life, and experienced some of the best moments of my life. Laughs and most interesting discussions at the PG office or at University buildings' corridors, conference journeys with peers and staff from the department, or feeling proud of having reached academic milestones are some of these moments. During this time, I have also experienced challenges and bad times, but always felt supported and accompanied through these.

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# DEDICATION

For Víctor and Lucas

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the topic of human rights and social justice in social work and social work education, and outline my broad rationale for researching this topic in England and Spain. I consider the definitions of human rights and social justice used in this research, and introduce the research background, including my positioning in relation to the research topic. I end the chapter by providing an outline of the thesis structure.

## Human rights and social justice in social work and social work education

Social work's emergence and historical evolution has been intertwined with evolving notions of human rights and social justice prevailing in different contexts and periods in time. Nowadays, the consensus on these two principles permeates social work definitions and codes of ethics across the world (Banks, 2006; Lundy, 2011), including the codes of ethics of the British and Spanish national associations of social workers (BASW, 2012; CGTS, 2012). The international definition of social work asserts that "Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work"<sup>1</sup>, with the commentary notes on the definition stating that "advocating and upholding human rights and social justice is the motivation and justification for social work" (IFSW and IASSW, 2014b). The Global Standards for social work education (Sewpaul and Jones, 2005) promote human rights (HR) and social justice (SJ) as world-wide unifying themes in social work education.

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<sup>1</sup> **Global Definition of the Social Work Profession:**

"Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels".

Social workers are largely aware, through frontline experience and the profession's body of knowledge, that all across the world people are suffering the effects of increasing inequality. Much of this is a consequence of dominant aggressive expressions of neoliberal globalization, and the mechanisms and systems maintaining it. Even in countries with a welfare tradition, such as England and Spain, people are seeing their quality and expectations of life cut back, and their human rights violated, for example through the degradation of working conditions, the retreat of civil liberties on grounds of national security, austerity measures, the expansion of poverty and the degradation of natural environments. Putting it bluntly, Lundy (2011: 38) has claimed that 'social injustice is killing people' worldwide, as many are dying victims of the several social injustices pervading contemporary societies. These include deaths resulting from human created disasters, from the effects of poverty on health, the deterioration of food and water supplies, the result of plundering or damaging people's homelands (Dominelli, 2012b).

It has been claimed for decades, that in an increasingly complex and globalized world, where many social problems gain an international dimension and structural inequalities are constantly created or deepened by uncontrolled neoliberal market mechanisms, narrow individual social work interventions can no longer meet service users' needs if not framed within HR and SJ perspectives (e.g. Dominelli and Khan, 2000 ). Such narrow approaches to the profession could further contribute to perpetuate existing structural inequalities instead (Dominelli, 2004). These arguments suggest that contemporary social work faces a significant challenge to play its part in the struggle to counter social structures and policies that privilege other interests and criteria over people's needs and rights in globalizing societies.

The value of social justice is constantly undermined by neoliberal discourses, and the possibilities of achieving social justice questioned on the basis of individual and institutional powerlessness against the forces of globalization. Whilst acknowledging that the new social realities imposed by current forms of globalization make it necessary to rethink old concepts and mechanisms for seeking and reclaiming human rights and social justice, critical perspectives in social work and social sciences offer insights and knowledge of the flaws of neoliberal argumentation and evidence of failing neoliberal projects in social work and beyond.

The view that social work's "essence" includes embracing structural, collective and political approaches and action in order to promote social change towards greater justice and human dignity has been reinforced by the 2016 International Social Work, Education and Social Development conference. In this conference, Silvana Martinez, president of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) Latin American and Caribbean region, argued that unless

social workers address issues of power and political structures, 'we will only end up blaming the social subjects for their own situation'(Martinez, 2016, cited in Hardy, 2016). In relation to limiting the profession to 'mere assistance and support', Silvana added that:

If we limit ourselves only to this type of practice, no matter how noble it is, we would be hiding the reality rather than revealing it. We will end up only acting on the surface of an absolutely cruel and unequal social order. We will be turning our backs on social inequality, we will be turning our backs on the essence of social work (Martinez, cited in Hardy, 2016).

As has been the case at previous International Social Work conferences, the SWSD 2016 conference has been a platform for social work academics and stakeholders to raise concerns and share good practice experiences facing widespread individualistic models of social work shaped and promoted by neoliberal agendas, which arguably result in the oppression of service users and professionals and are hardly compatible with the social justice and human rights principles, or "essence", of social work (Ioakimidis et al., 2014; Hardy, 2016).

Social work in the United Kingdom (UK) and Spain is claimed to be at a point of crisis facing current structural challenges and the spread of neoliberal ideology which reaches social work education. These crises have been described as placing social work at a 'crossroads' (Lavalette, 2011) with two potential outcomes: 1) the profession reinventing and strengthening its critical tradition towards the achievement of social justice or 2) the critical tradition's defeat and (further) marginalisation against the developments of neoliberal social work, with the subsequent retreat of many of the profession's HR and SJ goals. Higgins (2015) has recently highlighted the confrontation between 'a broad conception of social work as understood by the IFSW' and the bureaucratic approach to social work in England. The second, he argues, can be seen as aligned with a neoliberal education model which focusses 'on the service user as the "problem" and [is] disengaged from the wider socio-political context of contemporary society' (Higgins, 2015: 12). He refers to this confrontation as a struggle or debate about the 'soul' (nature) and future of social work. In this thesis I argue that social work education in Spain appears to be more closely aligned with broader conceptions of the profession and has preserved more autonomy from government agendas. But expressions of "neoliberal" social work practice models (bureaucracy, privatisation of services, etc.) are widespread in the country (Ioakimidis et al., 2014) and have the potential to increase their influence in social work education. This thesis is situated within the 'broad' view of social work which understands the profession as committed to the promotion of human rights and social justice.

It has long been argued that, for social work practitioners to start locating themselves within human rights and social justice frameworks, and to feel empowered to bring HR and SJ to their

practice in contexts which are often oppressive, it is fundamental that schools of social work play an important role by making HR and SJ central to social work education (Dominelli, 2004; Sewpaul and Jones, 2005). It is the aim of this research to explore how social work's commitment to human rights and social justice is operationalised in the training of social workers in higher education in England and Spain in order to contribute to critical debates and suggest recommendations for enhancing teaching in these areas in each country.

Both English and Spanish social work educational systems have experienced major reforms in the last decade which are continually evolving. Sims (2003), who conducted a comparative study of social work education in England and Spain, highlighted some differential characteristics of the developments and motivations leading to these reforms in each country (Sims, 2003). However, despite the very different underlying debates in each country, the reference documents for the development of new curricula in both countries do address the importance of HR and SJ dimensions of social work (Social Work Reform Board, 2010: 10; Vázquez O. *et al*, 2004) and raise a shared concern about the need to produce professionals prepared to respond to new social complexities. Hence, these European countries, which are both part of the European Higher Education Area, can be seen as appropriate sites for a comparative study of the complexities of teaching HR and SJ. This choice also responds to my connections to both: England the country where I am studying and Spain my country of origin.

There is literature, most from the United States (US/USA) and Canada, which discusses methods, difficulties, and good experiences of teaching human rights and /or social justice to social work students (Wehbi and Straka, 2010; Poole, 2010; Dudziak, 2005). Some sources from England and Spain analyse the deeper role of social work education as the vehicle for passing values of human rights and social justice to social work students, as well as the political pressures and structural constraints affecting the ideology and practices of social work educational systems in these countries and therefore hindering or facilitating the promotion of a HR and SJ based social work by social work educators within these systems (Méndez Fernández *et al.*, 2006; Dominelli, 2007). However, in this thesis I aim to achieve a comparative, holistic and situated understanding of how HR and SJ are shaped and materialised in social work education in England and Spain in order to identify ways forward for critical developments in social work and social work education to strengthen the commitment to human rights and social justice in each country.

Achieving such a holistic yet situated understanding has required me to develop my "sociological imagination" which, according to Mills (2000 [1959]: 3-4), involves an awareness of 'the intricate connection' between history, society, and 'the patterns' of biographies and

experiences of the people involved and affected by these. My attempt to achieve this awareness and knowledge drawing from my experience and contrasting this with other social work educators and students', as well as with indicators of underlying social structures and historical conditions, has shaped the methodology and the contributions of my research.

## Definitions of human rights and social justice

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) defines human rights as the inalienable rights belonging to every person for the fact of being human. These are rights and freedoms that allow us to satisfy human fundamental needs and fully develop our qualities and conscience, and which 'set the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world' (United Nations, 1949; EHRC, 2016; Reichert, 2003). The commentary notes of the international definition of social work (IFSW and IASSW, 2014b) assert that 'Social work embraces first, second and third generation rights', clarifying that:

First generation rights refer to civil and political rights such as free speech and conscience and freedom from torture and arbitrary detention; second generation to socio-economic and cultural rights that include the rights to reasonable levels of education, healthcare, and housing and minority language rights; and third generation rights focus on the natural world and the right to species biodiversity and inter-generational equity. These rights are mutually reinforcing and interdependent, and accommodate both individual and collective rights.

Ife (2001: 10), an internationally influential theorist on human rights in social work has claimed, moreover, that human rights can be considered to constitute an unfinished and evolving project whose particular expressions at different times and contexts result from a shared understanding of what it means to be human.

In contrast with these broader definitions of human rights, the Equality and Human Rights Commission of the United Kingdom (EHRC) defines human rights from a legalistic perspective as fundamental rights and freedoms of any person in the world, but which 'are not just abstract concepts – they are defined and protected by law' (EHRC, 2016). This definition refers to the UK's Human Rights Act 1998. The Spanish Constitution (supreme/highest law) states that the rights and freedoms it grants must be interpreted according to the UNDHR (United Nations, 1949) and any Human Rights treaties ratified by Spain, but there is not an equivalent human rights law in Spanish legislation.

Social justice is another concept that escapes a single understanding and is subjected to much philosophical debate. Social justice definitions are often broad, and tend to incorporate notions of human rights or are openly inspired by these. Visser et al. (2010: 364) for example, define social

justice as 'an ideal state of society where individuals and social groups enjoy protection of their basic HR and receive a just share of the benefits of social cooperation'. The connection between human rights and social justice has been highlighted and promoted by authors in the field of social work. Mohan (2007) has claimed that respect for HR constitutes a fundamental pillar of contemporary notions of SJ, and Dominelli (2007) and Reichert (2003) have emphasised how HR can 'guide us on the road' to the identification and elimination of structural inequalities towards a greater justice. But extremely narrow definitions of social justice can be also found. The Centre for Social Justice in the UK, has recently defined social justice as 'helping those on the margins of our society' in its "Transforming Lives to Strengthen Britain – A Social Justice Manifesto for 2015". Their argument is that seeking 'social justice, helping those on the margins of our society, benefits everybody...when families on the margins find stability, work and independence from the social breakdown that holds them back, more adults and children have a chance to thrive. More people become net contributors within society and demands on the public purse reduce. We all gain'. I believe that such a definition speaks for itself in promoting a conservative, neoliberal agenda. In tackling social injustice, the focus shifts from the social structures to problem individuals and families, and economic arguments are put before values of fairness or individuals' intrinsic worth (CSJ, 2015: 3).

In the literature review of this thesis, I expand on key perspectives in relation to the concepts of human rights and social justice. But for the purposes of this research, and drawing from a synthesis of the ideas above, I understand HR and SJ as follows: Human rights mainly refer to the rights recognised in the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights although they can also comprise the changing and dialogical interpretations of what should be considered as basic human needs and rights by people globally and locally. Social justice is the state of society where human rights are respected and everyone is entitled to a fair share of the available resources and benefits of social cooperation.

## Myself and the research background

I believe that it is important for me to briefly introduce myself early in this thesis, as who I am and some of my life experiences are closely interrelated with the purpose, focus and contributions of this research on the role of human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain.

I am a 30-year-old Spanish woman who has been living in England for six years. At the point of writing the introduction of this thesis, I have been a social work lecturer at an English University

for one year. Prior to this, I was a full-time postgraduate student studying for a social work related MA and then for this PhD at another University in England. Since the beginning of my postgraduate studies in England, I have been involved in the UK's Social Work Action Network (SWAN). The SWAN's critical and radical approaches to the social work profession, and progressive political ideology fit very well with my own views on social work's mission and fundamental values, as well as with my broader personal and political values.

In Spain, I had studied for a social work degree leading to a social work qualification, and had worked as a social worker for a short period of time before applying to study an MA in England. The research design and many of the decisions I made during the research process draw heavily from my experiences, observations and reflections as an insider (and outsider) in the two social work education systems, which fostered my interest in this research topic. Human rights and social justice are at the core of the values which led me to study social work, and reflect my strong belief in human dignity, peace, forgiveness, solidarity, relational understandings of wellbeing and the importance of social justice struggles. I believe these personal values are heavily influenced by my Spanish cultural background and my Catholic religious background.

The values of "human rights" and "social justice" are internationally placed at the core of the social work profession, as it is reflected in the current and previous international definitions of social work (IFSW and IASSW, 2014b; IFSW, 2000), in the statements and agendas of organisations of international influence for social work such as the IFSW, the IASSW (International Association of Schools of Social Work) or the ICSW (International Council of Social Welfare), and in social work codes of ethics worldwide (Banks, 2006: 84; Lundy, 2011: 29). This includes the codes of ethics of the British and Spanish national associations of social workers (The College of Social Work, 2012; CGTS, 2012). However, my experiences in both educational systems led me to realise that behind the apparent consensus on HR and SJ there were, at least between these two countries, different ways of applying these values to social work education, and social work practice.

In a context marked by unfolding global and European economic crises, at the moment of designing the research I saw the promotion of these core social work values as of paramount importance. The European socioeconomic crisis was arguably being caused by unbridled capitalist mechanisms and the socially irresponsible behaviour of financial institutions and economic and political powers (Lundy, 2011; Jordan and Drakeford, 2012). But this was at the same time serving to justify and advance neoliberal ideology and long existing austerity agendas in Europe, amid increasing social injustice and suffering affecting the most vulnerable people in Europe, including England and Spain (FOESSA, 2013; López Jiménez and Renes Ayala, 2011; Eurostat, 2013). Facing



this, I believed (and I believe now) that the social work profession needed to take a stand in the defence of its core values of human rights and social justice both in terms of promoting these for service users through social work practice and defending itself from attempts to reshape the profession along neoliberal lines, including cuts in services and resources and expanding government control over social work education.

I believed that human rights and social justice could be pivotal topics from which to explore and compare the two educational systems from a focussed perspective in order to promote an emancipatory form of social work education concerned about the negative impact of neoliberal structural forces on the profession and its service users. This would be a way of promoting emancipatory social work practice in line with the value statements of social work international organisations and British and Spanish codes of ethics.

Rode (2009: 29) highlights the enhanced opportunities globalised societies offer social workers for transferring experiences between different parts of the world in order to solve local problems and/or improve local professional practice; and indicates a series of benefits of comparative methodology in international social work research. These include: the avoidance of ethnocentrism in observation and description; the use of comparison as a form of variable control when facing explanatory questions; and the use of comparison to support learning from the experience of others (after a proper evaluation of context and transferability).

Indeed, I have found that my learning experiences in each country's social work education systems have enriched my understanding and boosted my criticality and curiosity about what I learnt in the counterpart educational system. Moreover, I felt that these experiences provided me with a privileged perspective from which I could perceive more easily some of the strengths and limitations of social work education in the two countries in relation to the incorporation and fulfilment of these two core social work values.

It was my belief that such an overview could help identify interesting ideas and transferable practices in order to identify and overcome challenges or limitations in social work education in the other country and vice versa, enhancing good practice in both countries as suggested by Rode (2009). These ideas and practices could relate for example to the theoretical frameworks and teaching tools used by social work educators in each country, to the deeper understanding of the ways in which the very concepts of human rights and social justice may link with social work.

## Research aims, objectives and questions

Drawing from the above research background and personal interest in this research, I established the following **overarching aims** to: 1) explore how social work's global commitment to promoting and respecting the values of human rights and social justice (as embodied in the statements and agendas of organisations of international influence for social work such as the IFSW, the IASSW or the ICSW) was materialised in social work education at higher education institutions in two European countries: England and Spain; and 2) contribute to critical thinking on the role of human rights and social justice in social work education.

More specific **research objectives** are:

1. To explore the understandings of HR and SJ in social work education.
2. To explore, from a critical theory perspective, the role of ideology and political agendas regarding human rights and social justice in social work education in these two countries.
3. To explore the mechanisms used to transmit HR and SJ to social work students, in the two culturally contrasting European countries.
4. To develop a series of recommendations to support social work educators to embed HR and SJ in their everyday teaching practice.

Research questions changed and evolved throughout the research process as part of my flexible approach to the research design. The final **research questions** are outlined as follows:

1. What are the understandings of the role of HR and SJ in social work education in England and Spain?
2. What are the main characteristics of social work education's contexts in England and Spain – including underlying ideologies and political agendas? How do these impact the teaching and learning about HR and SJ in social work?
3. What mechanisms and teaching practices are used to transmit HR and SJ to social work students in England and Spain? And what are social work educators and social work students' experiences of these?
4. What could help social work educators operationalize the commitment to the values of HR and SJ embodied in the Global Standards for social work education? What lessons can be learned from educational practices in these different cultural contexts?

## Thesis structure

The thesis is structured in eight chapters.

Following this introduction, chapter two, the literature review, is divided into two main parts focusing on 1) social justice and 2) human rights, considering their relevance and relationships with the social work profession and social work education.

In chapter three, I offer a comparative historical overview of developments in social work education in England and Spain from the inception of the profession to the present time, and explore cultural and ideological influences on the profession in the two countries.

Chapter four presents the overall research design focusing on critical realist methodology, research quality and research ethics. Chapter five considers in detail the two empirical methods used in the research: a) web surveys and b) qualitative interviews. For each method I discuss their advantages and acknowledge limitations and challenges. I also discuss sampling, instrument design, ethics, data collection and data analysis.

The logic of the structure of the two finding chapters of the thesis mirrors the logic of the critical realist model of Danermark et al. (2002) which I have adapted for this research by reducing their proposed process of six stages to the four stages of: 1) Description, 2) Analytical resolution, 3) Theoretical redescription (abduction) and retroduction, 4) Concretisation and contextualisation. Chapter six covers 1) description and 2) analytical resolution. Chapter seven draws together the survey and interview data and interprets these in the light of the literature, to address the research questions.

Chapter seven is divided into three sections focusing respectively on 1) understandings of human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain, 2) the ideology and political agendas affecting social work education in England and Spain, and 3) teaching, learning and performing human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain. Each section will offer theory informed explanations for the patterns found.

In chapter eight, the concluding chapter, I revisit the research design and offer a summary of findings and a series of recommendations for social work educators, discuss limitations and strengths of the research, and highlight the research's original contribution to social work knowledge. I go on to reflect on my learning from this PhD, suggest areas for further research, and draw the thesis together with some concluding thoughts.

**TABLE 1 RESEARCH AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS**

<b>RESEARCH OVERARCHING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explore how social work's global commitment to promoting and respecting the values of human rights and social justice (as embodied in the statements and agendas of organisations of international influence for social work such as the IFSW, the IASSW or the ICSW) is materialised in social work education in two European countries: England and Spain.</li> </ul>
<b>AIMS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To contribute to critical thinking on the place of HR and SJ in social work education</li> </ul>

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	RESEARCH QUESTIONS (RQs)	ADDRESSED IN:
<b>OBJ. 1 To explore the understandings of HR and SJ in social work education in England and Spain</b>	RQ 1 What are the understandings of HR and SJ in social work education in England and Spain?	Chapters 6 and 7: presenting and interpreting the data. Specific section in chapter 7: <i>Understandings of HR and SJ in social work and social work education in England and Spain</i>
<b>OBJ. 2 To explore, from a critical theory perspective, the role of ideology and political agendas regarding HR and SJ in social work education in these two countries</b>	RQ 2 What are the main the characteristics of social work education's contexts in England and Spain – including underlying ideologies and political agendas? How do these impact the teaching and learning about HR and SJ in social work?	Chapter 3: Contextualising social work education in England and Spain Specific section in chapter 7: <i>Ideology and political agendas affecting social work education in England and Spain.</i>
<b>OBJ.3 To explore the mechanisms used to transmit HR and SJ to social work students in England and Spain</b>	RQ 3 What mechanisms and teaching practices are used to transmit HR and SJ to social work students in England and Spain? And what are social work educators and social work students' experiences of these?	Chapters 6 and 7: presenting and interpreting the data. Specific section in chapter 7: <i>Teaching, learning and performing HR and SJ in social work education in England and Spain.</i>
<b>J. 4 To develop a series of recommendations to support social work educators to embed HR and SJ in their everyday teaching practice</b>	RQ 4 What could help social work educators operationalize the commitment to the values of HR and SJ embodied in the Global Standards for social work education? What lessons can be learned from educational practices in these different cultural contexts?	Chapter 8: conclusions and recommendations chapter.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

This literature review chapter is divided in two main parts: 1) social justice and 2) human rights, considering their relevance and relationships with the social work profession and social work education. I start with a general introduction setting out the approach and methodology used to review the literature.

During the PhD process, I developed the literature review in two phases. The first had a narrative focus and the second one a systematic focus.

**Phase 1, narrative focus:** In the first year of the PhD I conducted a broad, narrative literature review on human rights and social justice and how these link with social work and social work education. I aimed for both depth and breadth in my developing understanding of the research topic in order to get an overview of the body of knowledge on these areas, fill gaps in my understandings of these topics and allow myself space for flexible connection of ideas and pieces of work. At that stage much of the focus was on international social work literature and I was open to reading and learning from sources from any parts of the world, although I paid particular attention to the literature from England and Spain. As a result, I produced several pieces of writing focusing on topics such as: social work and globalization, social work and human rights, social work and social justice, or the relationship between human rights, social justice and social work. In these papers, I explored and clarified (to myself as much as to the reader) basic concepts, key historical developments, main theories and current debates in the social work profession about each of these topics. These pieces of work have served me as key foundations and references throughout the PhD. Through these I had put in order, synthesised and banked the knowledge gained on the topic. These served as the foundation of the next stages of the research, including the final design of the research methodology. Furthermore, the work and writing from the first year of studies was key in allowing me to explore the various arguments around contested topics and identifying my own thinking about these. Starting to identify my positioning in the research was important in order to work towards the quality criteria of the research (transparency and self-awareness) and in order to be able to reflect on the various ways my views and subjectivity could be influencing my interpretation of findings. It was also important for me to

recognise that my self-awareness would be changing and developing along the full research process as I acquired new theoretical knowledge, learned from the research findings and had new life experiences in relation to the research topic.

**Phase 2, systematic focus:** Whilst reading, reviewing, and classifying relevant literature on the topic was a continuous activity during the whole research process (more or less intense during different periods), in the last year of studies I conducted a final and more sharply focussed literature search and review. The main aim was to maximise the chances of identifying up to date sources with specific relevance to the research topic. In this phase, I conducted the search at one point in time, proceeding according to basic systematic review stages (Kiteley and Stogdon, 2014). Firstly, I pre-selected key terms for a Boolean search in English and Spanish languages and databases. For example, (in English): “(human rights OR social justice) AND social work education” or “social work education AND (England OR United Kingdom OR Spain)”. I also established that I would search for literature in both languages from 2013 onwards (the date I shifted my focus from the initial literature review to data collection), and limit my search to scholarly and peer reviewed sources. Then, I carried out the searches in relevant databases and identified from abstracts twenty potentially relevant sources which I had not come across before. Once I accessed the sources I assessed their relevance for the topic of human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain, separating the most relevant sources from those broadly aligned but not directly related to it. As a result of this process I identified five journal articles I had not read before with strong relevance to the topic together with new data or ideas, and discarded those that were less closely aligned to the topic or lacked new perspectives on the topic. Finally, I conducted a search based on the previous systematic criteria but including sources prior to 2013 and was reassured that relevant historical sources on the topic had been covered in my narrative literature review and that I was aware of key literature on the topic as well as of main gaps in knowledge.

It needs to be noted, however, that throughout the research I was able to find a much higher number of sources in the English than the Spanish language. Among the sources in English there was a good representation of sources from the UK but most of the sources in Spanish were from Latin American countries and/or focused on the Latin American social work context. Relevant sources focusing on the Spanish social work context were relatively few. I believe this reflects a gap in the Spanish social work knowledge base on the topic of this research. However, I want to be cautious in relation to highlighting and assessing the extent of such gap, as I may have missed some relevant references from the Spanish context due to my greater familiarity with the academic context, social work knowledge base, and literature searches in England than in Spain. I

recognise that this difference in the input of sources in the two languages and from the two countries will have resulted in the research being more strongly influenced by the understandings of HR and SJ and social work body of knowledge from English speaking contexts.

In this chapter, I offer an overview of key concepts, theories, debates, and research evidence relevant for this study of HR and SJ in social work education in England and Spain. Unsurprisingly for a profession which embraces HR and SJ amongst its core principles and ethical values (IFSW and IASSW, 2014b), I have found the vast majority of the literature on the topic aligned with HR and SJ aspirations (although based on varying and often competing approaches and understandings of these). This reflects my own professional and personal values and in this thesis I am openly committed from the outset to contribute to the promotion of a HR and SJ oriented social work education. The literature review introduces the nature of the debates around HR and SJ within the profession and discusses authors' nuanced views and competing arguments, but it does not aim to question the value of these principles or offer a balanced account of arguments for and against these. Where claims against the value of HR and SJ in social work are discussed, these are generally reported as being incompatible with social work's mission and professional ethics.

The next sections summarise the main ideas and theories, historical developments and current social work debates surrounding HR and SJ. Achieving this overview through my literature review has helped me reach an in-depth understanding of some of the various ways HR and SJ link with social work and, together with the research data, this has enlightened me about some of the possibilities and challenges facing social work education committed to the promotion of HR and SJ based social work.

## Social Work and Social Justice

In this first part of the literature review, focusing on social justice, I offer an overview of social justice key concepts, theories, debates, and research evidence which I consider relevant to social work education in England and Spain. This will include an exploration of Rawls' and Sen's social justice theories, an overview of the history of the social justice ideal and of the role of social justice in the history of social work. I also consider research on social justice teaching in social work education, and indications of future directions of social work education for social justice in the globalized world of the 21st century.

### Introduction

In social work, social justice is a widely embraced guiding principle and umbrella concept that is claimed to group many of social work's goals (O'Brien, 2011: 174-175; Banks, 2006: 50-52; Reichert, 2003: 9). Banks (2006: 50-52) asserts that social justice is deeply rooted the profession's knowledge and value base worldwide. She argues that social work's emphasis on social justice distinguishes its ethics and perspectives from other caring professions, such as medicine or nursing, and points out that this commitment to social justice 'is a source of strength and distinctiveness' of the profession (Banks, 2006: 52). However, Banks (2006: 52) warns, an engagement with social justice is 'also potentially leading to conflict and misunderstanding as social workers are more committed to anti-oppressive approaches to practice and working for progressive change in society' than other close professions with which social work often interacts. Therefore, she argues, social workers require 'not only a good understanding of the concepts and principles of social justice... but also the confidence, commitment, motivation and skills to put these principles into practice in difficult and challenging contexts' (Banks, 2006:52).

During recent decades, there has been growing support within the social work profession internationally for the claim that the coupled principles of social justice and human rights set the strongest grounds for resistance against root causes of all forms of discrimination, and a way forward for a humane and sustainable development of societies (United Nations, 1994: 9; IFSW, 2000; IFSW and IASSW, 2014b; IASSW and IFSW, 2004). However, it has also been recognised that the implications of social justice (involving the satisfaction of basic human needs and a fair sharing of resources and social benefits) are particularly broad and difficult to delimit, codify and enforce (Cramme and Diamond, 2009b; Pichaud, 2008: 33; United Nations, 1994: 9), and that the elusiveness of social justice tends to make it 'lack a ready application to social work practice' (Reichert, 2003: 9).



The United Nations' (UN) Human Rights guide for schools of social work (UN, 1994:9) states that some basic social justice aims include universal access to fundamental health and education services, protection from individual and group disadvantages and certain control and redistribution in relation to labour retributions, economic profits, and consumption; but more specific definitions and measurable principles of social justice vary among contexts and situations. Snauwaert (2011: 320) argues that something that all modern theories of social justice have in common is that they depart from the ethical 'intuitive idea of intrinsic value and dignity' of every person. This points to the arguably intrinsic relationship between concepts of human rights and social justice.

Cramme and Diamond (2009a: 8) are amongst theorists who hold the view that 'the basic idea of social justice ...is not an empirically verifiable end-state or ideal- type of society' but 'an ethical commitment' and therefore 'inevitably contested'. This implies that what social justice means, and how governments and professions should seek it, is subjected to different understandings, debates and struggles. Ascribing to this view and facing the ambiguity that surrounds ideas of social justice and hinders its incorporation to social work education and practice, I believe that the profession should engage with an active role in the construction of social justice understandings rather than shying away from these debates. It is argued that social workers can engage with these debates drawing from their knowledge of the living conditions of those affected by inequality and oppression, their expertise in dialogue and mediation, and their commitment to assist and empower people to meet their needs and have their rights respected (United Nations, 1994).

In order that this thesis can contribute to debates on the role of social justice in social work education, I needed to achieve a better understanding of how different theories and interpretations of social justice lead to different implications for social work ethics, knowledge and practice. I believed that a sound theoretical foundation about the concept of social justice would assist me to handle (though never eliminate) the ambiguity that surrounds ideas of social justice and which hinders their incorporation in social work education and practice. With these aims, I developed this literature review in which: Firstly, I explore the main general approaches of social justice theories (namely: libertarian, utilitarian and egalitarian) and two key modern theorists of social justice: John Rawls and Amartya Sen. Then, I consider intertwined developments of social justice and social work, which date back to the profession's inception at the end of the 19th century. Lastly I discuss the challenges and possibilities for the global social work profession in pursuing the enhancement of social justice and human rights at different levels of practice (global, national, local) in globalised societies of the 21st century.

## Theories of social justice

Theories of social justice have been commonly classified in libertarian, utilitarian and egalitarian (Reichert, 2003: 8).

The fundamental characteristic of libertarian theories is that they reject any obligation of individuals to share their resources and, as a consequence, state sponsored redistribution of resources (Reichert, 2003: 9; Merkel, 2009: 41-42). The scope of social justice from these theories is limited to equality before the law and a minimum social protection only for those unable to support themselves (Merkel, 2009: 41-42). Any further help or social services provision outside market rules is seen as belonging to the terrain of charity and not to that of rights and justice (Reichert, 2003: 9-10). Utilitarian theories are guided by the fundamental principle of achieving 'the greatest good for the greatest number' and are therefore less concerned about interfering in people's freedoms and rights to property in order to achieve a fairer distributions of resources (Reichert, 2003: 10). This is based on utilitarianism's basic idea that 'the right action is that which produces the greatest balance of good over evil' (Banks, 2006: 36). By contrast, egalitarian theories of social justice claim that the needs of all must be considered as a moral imperative. Citizens 'must have equal rights, equal opportunities and equal access to social resources' (Reichert, 2003: 11). For an example of an alternative classification of broader theories of social justice Merkel (2009)'s work can be consulted <sup>2</sup>.

Notions of justice in social work often include elements of these three theories, but it is the egalitarian approach which is claimed to fit best with the professions' goals (Reichert, 2003: 11), ethical base (Banks, 2006) and moral purpose to promote an 'increasing cooperation ... and solidarity in society' (Adams et al., 2009: 1).

Two key modern theories of social justice can be argued to be of great relevance for social work: John Rawls' (1971) social-liberal theory of justice and Amartya Sen's (2009) theory of justice which focuses on human capabilities and is aligned with egalitarian principles. Rawls' theory of justice is widely acknowledged as the main reference for social workers' understanding of social justice (Finn and Jacobson, 2003a: 16). However, Sen's theory which is more recent and underexplored

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<sup>2</sup> Merkel (2009), for example, divides theories of social justice into 'libertarian', 'social-liberal' and 'communitarian', according to their individual or collective orientation and their inclination towards redistribution. Thus, individual anti redistribution theories would result in libertarian formulations of social justice; individual pro redistribution in social liberal theories; and community oriented pro redistribution in communitarian theories of social justice. (See Merkel (2009:40) for a graph illustrating these categories and contributing authors).

in social work, arguably offers a better fit with social work values. It offers great potential for understanding social work struggles for social justice in contemporary globalised societies, especially in relation to community work and development oriented social work.

### John Rawls' theory of justice

Rawls' (1971) *A theory of justice* is widely considered the starting point of contemporary philosophical theories of social justice (Burchardt and Craig, 2008; Wolff, 2008: 18; Merkel, 2009: 38).

For Rawls (1971), there are two main principles of social justice, regarding "justice as fairness" and "just arrangements". "Justice as fairness" implies that every person has an equal right to exercise a maximum of liberty, limited only by the requirement that this is compatible with the same right to liberty of others. "Just arrangements" imply that social and economic inequalities are only legitimate as long as they result in a maximum benefit of the disadvantaged and derive from positions and activities opened to all under equal opportunity. In Rawls' (1999 [1971]:53) formulation:

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties of others.

Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.

According to Rawls (1971), any given group of people facing the task of defining just societies, not motivated by personal selfish interests, would very likely agree that these two principles characterise just societies. From this perspective, a just society must remove, through just institutions, all the barriers for equal opportunities to social and economic benefits. This involves redressing any discriminatory and exploitative mechanisms, such as sexism, racism, or colonialism, and redistributing power and economic benefits (Albee, 1986 and Saleebey, 1990 both cited in Finn and Jacobson, 2003a: 17).

Rawls' work has generated many responses. These include critiques of writers from very different approaches; from Nozick's (1974) contestation defending a libertarian model of justice, to Walzer's (1983) critique drawing from a communitarian approach to social justice, and Amartya Sen (2009; 1992; 1999), whose approach to social justice focuses on human capabilities.

## Amartya Sen's idea of justice and the capabilities approach to social justice

Sen's book *The Idea of Justice* criticises Rawls' focus (as well as that of classic authors such as Hobbes, Rousseau and Kant) on the characterization of 'perfectly just institutions' that would bring perfect justice to societies (Sen, 2009: 6). This, for Sen, is problematic as there is a possible plurality of competing principles for the assessment of justice and therefore perfect social arrangements cannot be identified. Instead, it would be necessary to compare different arrangements, each of them imperfect from other points of view. Therefore, he claims that theories of justice should depart from the world as it is and compare more and less just systems and institutions focusing on the advancement or retreat of justice they produce. Sen names the theories of Adam Smith, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill as examples of such an approach (Sen, 2009: 7).

Crucially, in *The Idea of Justice* (2009: 18), Sen argues 'the need for an accomplishment-based understanding of justice which is linked with the argument that justice cannot be indifferent to the lives that people can actually live'. He highlights the importance of human lives and the realisation of human capabilities in the context of the social processes affecting them over institutions and rules in the theorisation for social justice. Therefore, he calls for leaving behind empty rhetoric regarding perfect institutions and focusing on the realization-focused comparison of different social arrangements and the subsequent reforms of such arrangements to eliminate manifest injustice wherever it occurs. He points out that, when agitating against injustice, people worldwide claim for more global justice and not for a 'minimal humanitarianism' or a perfect world; they want the elimination of outrageously unjust arrangements (Sen, 2009: 26). Thus, for Sen, the struggle for social justice starts with awareness and indignation towards the particular expressions of human suffering arising from deprivation and oppression (Sen, 2009: 412).

A fundamental claim of Sen is that people's difficulties in both accessing primary goods and in converting those resources into good living, need to be taken into account in assessing freedom of opportunity to do those things they value. Freedom of opportunity is at the core of his idea of social justice. For example, a disabled person can do fewer things with the same resources than a non-disabled person, and a pregnant woman needs more support with nutrition than women who are not pregnant (Sen, 2009: 66).

This approach to social justice based on capabilities developed by Sen (1992; 1999; 2009) and Nussbaum (2003; 2006; 2011) has become a key foundation for both local and global justice theories and development work, having influenced the policies of organisations such as the UN (Wolff, 2008: 23). Nevertheless, it has been argued that aspects of the capabilities approach, such

as the open definition of human capabilities or the determination of levels of sufficiency, pose difficulties in bringing this theory to practice, especially in policy contexts, and much work is still needed around this newly welcomed approach for its ready implementation (Wolff, 2008: 23).

Despite this, it can be argued that Sen's focus on social justice as resulting from human capabilities to function and live decent, good human lives according with the cultural standards of particular societies and within open human rights frameworks, makes it an extremely appropriate reference for social work's understanding and pursuit of social justice in contexts of practice. It fits very well with social work's commitment to the promotion of 'social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people' together with 'principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities' in order to 'address life challenges and enhance wellbeing' (IFSW and IASSW, 2014a).

The capabilities approach has been linked, at a philosophical level, with social work's critical and humanistic models such as those inspired by the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1921-1997), which combine important elements of both critical and humanist traditions. Snauwaert (2011: 327) argues that 'a realization-focused' theory of justice is implicit in Freire's critical philosophy'. Drawing on Fromm's humanistic ideas, Freire conceived 'a person's being in terms of innate capacities that are developed through dialogical encounters and impeded by oppressive social relations and structures' (Snauwaert, 2011: 328). Therefore, the development of realization-focused conceptions of social justice can philosophically inform, renew and strengthen critical developments of the profession on the lines of Paulo Freire and other relevant Latin American writers' contributions (e.g. Ander-Egg 1972; 1984; 1996).

Outlining these links between the capabilities approach to global social justice and particular social work models of practice may bring these theories closer to front line social workers and inform their anti-oppressive, social justice and human rights based social work practice in contemporary societies. It must be noted, however, that these theories are all too easily dismissed in political, intellectual and social climates dominated by widespread neoliberal ideologies that conceive social justice in libertarian terms.

## Historical developments of social justice and social work

### The history of the social justice ideal

Ideas of social justice have evolved along the two last centuries and influenced the social work profession from its inception at the end of the 19th century. Nonetheless, first debates around the question of what make societies just date back to the distant past. This question was addressed by the classic philosophers Aristotle and Plato, mediaeval theologians and renaissance thinkers such as Hobbes (Raphael, 2001). These and other older traditions and ideas of justice have undoubtedly influenced modern conceptions of social justice. However, the specific ideal of the concept of social justice, distinctively entailing meeting 'individuals' needs as a claim of justice and not of charity' and requiring a redistribution of resources by the state for this purpose, did not emerge clearly until the late 18th century (Jackson, 2005).

More specifically, Jackson (2005: 367) has concluded from an analysis of key works on the history of the social justice concept, the emergence of social justice can be seen as 'the child of the industrial and French revolutions and its intellectual origins ... related to both the evolution of the social sciences ... and the modernisation of republican political thought'. He states that it was within a context marked by an increased commercial activity in Europe (from late 17th to early 19th centuries), the industrial revolution, and the egalitarian politics of the French revolution that notable shifts in the attitudes towards poverty started to take place.

Jackson (2005) asserts that, in the field of political philosophy, proposals involving state redistribution of resources started to take shape at the end of the 18th century, and the new ideal of social justice inspired a number of books and political movements in the 19th century. However, Fleischacker (2005: 80) argues that this ideal remained at the margins of political discourse until the 20th century.

Fleischacker (2005) attributes the marginal position of the social justice ideal before the 20th century to the fact that it did not fit well with the prevailing theories of political philosophy, namely: Marxism, positivism and utilitarianism, although he points out that there was a complex interaction between social justice and these theories. But the greatest theoretical opposition to the emergent ideal of social justice throughout the 19th century was, according to Fleischacker and Jones (cited in Jackson, 2005: 368), posed by new traditions of *laissez faire* individualism departing from (though significantly diverging from) Adam Smiths' work, and by conservative backlashes against the revolutionary radicalism of the previous century.

As the 19th century advanced and, with it, the social problems associated with industrialisation, new views of the poor as citizens with a right to minimum material conditions prompted the search for ways to technically relieve poverty and enhance people's rights (Jackson, 2005; Eroles et al., 1997). According to Eroles (1997: 17-18) such responses took the form of political ideologies (e.g. democratic socialism, revolutionary socialism, anarchism) social and economic arrangements (e.g. syndicalism or cooperativism) and humanistic responses to the 'social question', which included social action from voluntary and professional groups and religious associations. These humanistic developments led to the emergence of a series of new professions and specialities aimed at addressing the social situation of the period. Professional social work was one of them, together with sociology, anthropology, and nursing, among others (Eroles, 1997: 18).

In this context, the social justice ideal re-emerged as a foundation for the elimination of poverty and the advance of progress and wellbeing in societies at the end of the 19th century, progressively becoming a defining ideal of political practices of many Western countries throughout the 20th century (Fleischacker, 2005). "Social contracts" such as Roosevelt's New Deal (in the United States), the social market economy in Europe or Britain's post-war state of Attlee, Beveridge and Keynes are significant expressions of such politics, which gained unprecedented strength and expansion after the Second World War (Dominelli, 2010: 20-22; Cramme and Diamond, 2009a: 4-5). By means of these politics, Western governments attempted 'to strike a balance between the power of capital, labour and the state by embedding the market within a regulatory framework that sought to reconcile economic efficiency with social justice' (Cramme and Diamond, 2009a: 5).

Fleischacker (2005: 83) points out that the international adoption of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (which included 'an extravagant set of economic rights') 'shows that the notion of distributive or social justice was firmly entrenched by the middle of the 20th century'. And he argued that the promotion (in articles 22, 23 and 25) of the right to social security, economic, social and cultural goods indispensable for the dignity and freedom of people, protection against unemployment and food, clothing, housing and healthcare, reflected an advancement of social justice unprecedented within legal frameworks in any country.

However, Fleischacker (2005: 84) also argued that despite social justice ideal's progressive materialisation into the politics of the 20th century, theorisation on social justice in the fields of political philosophy and political economy remained into the background until 'the renaissance in the theory of justice' (Merkel, 2009: 38). This was seen in the development of Rawls' theory of

justice, developed from the 1950s and culminating in the publication of *A Theory of Justice* in 1971. (Fleischacker, 2005: 84).

Rawls' work has dominated and influenced debates on social justice ever since (Wolff, 2008: 18; Pichaud, 2008: 35; Burchardt and Craig, 2008: 4; Merkel, 2009: 38) generating an 'ever-growing number of ideas, principles and norms of social justice' (Merkel, 2009: 38), and becoming a fundamental reference for social work's theorisation of social justice (Finn and Jacobson, 2003a: 16).

However, waves of neo-liberalism starting with the politics of Thatcher and Reagan in the 1980s and reinforced by contemporary political discourses driven by the pressures of global markets and international financial institutions (of key impact in Europe are the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission), have played a crucial role in eclipsing the theoretical productivity around ideas of social justice stimulated by Rawls' work, including Sen and Nussbaum's capabilities approach to social justice (Merkel, 2009; Harvey, 2007).

It is argued that in recent decades, discourses based on neo-liberal ideology have insisted that social justice is no longer a realistic aspiration, 'given the disciplines imposed by globalization, the shift in the balance of power between labour and capital, and the extent of international economic competition' (Cramme and Diamond, 2009a: 3). Hence, with 'neo-liberalism' having 'become the 'common sense' of most governments [both right and left oriented] throughout the world', a great backlash against social justice ideals, citizenship rights and universal human rights has been quickly and progressively gaining ground during the latest decades (Ferguson, 2008: 2-3). Such discourses have permeated to a greater or lesser extent many disciplines and professions' ideologies, theory and practice, including social work (Ferguson, 2008; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2006; Jones, 2004; Dominelli and Khan, 2000).

However, there are ever-growing claims from the different social sciences that whilst globalization has changed the ways of understanding social justice and posed important challenges for its pursuit, many of the neo-liberal arguments against the attainment of social justice ideals are at least exaggerated if not flawed (Cramme and Diamond, 2009b). In the UK, social work academics and activists aligned with the radical social work tradition through the SWAN network established in 2004, have played a key role in analysing, documenting, and denouncing "the neoliberal assault" on the social work profession and the characteristics and implications of 'neoliberal social work' (Jones, 2004: 96). Facing the challenges of neoliberalism, the SWAN network and the recently created journal *Critical and Radical Social Work* have sought to identify alternative



directions for the profession and re/sources of solidarity and hope towards a social work for social justice (Jones et al., 2004; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2013; SWAN, 2016; Policy Press, 2016). These include engagement with activism, building closer relationships with service users and sharing experiences of good social work practice across the world.

Cramme and Diamond (2009a: 13) argue, from a social policy perspective, that globalization 'needs to be understood as a social relationship which requires new forms of regulation'. In social work, the challenges of globalization also require new ways of thinking, theorising and practising for the profession to uphold its mission and values in challenging contexts marked by neoliberal globalisation and ideology. Arguably human rights and social justice can and should be enhanced today by the social work profession as much, or more, than ever before.

## Social justice in the history of social work

Since its inception...the social work profession has aspired to two goals: providing services to those in need and advocating for change to social policy and social conditions. While all social workers have embraced the first goal, the profession has often been divided over whether the second has a place within social work (Lundy, 2011: 49).

Throughout the 20th century, as the main responsibility for responses to poverty progressively shifted from charitable organisations to the nation state, social workers were assigned key roles in the development and upholding of welfare states (Lundy, 2011: 3; Payne, 2005). Thus, the profession became associated, almost from its emergence, with Western nation states' mechanisms for promoting social justice and for exercising social control. This position within the nation state has led social work to incorporate and combine values from different and often conflicting moral and political ideologies predominant at different periods of time.

Therefore, whilst social work emerged and evolved alongside and in interaction with other new professions and disciplines concerned with the "social", it was very soon placed in a position of tension that made it differ from other disciplines by its characteristically porous professional autonomy and boundaries (Payne, 2005; Eroles, 1997: 18). The different social movements with which social work has historically coexisted and interacted have also shaped the profession (Ferguson, 2008; Payne, 2005).

As social work started to spread across the globe, claiming its scientific and professional status, the profession's principles and value base interacted with national and specific local social arrangements, resulting in many different histories and practices of social work (Dominelli, 2010; Healy, 2012). Some of these expressions would enhance social justice and human rights practices, whilst others would result in imperialistic or oppressive practices at the disposal of governments

and religious powers (Ioakimidis, 2015; Dominelli, 2012a; Dominelli, 2010; Lundy, 2011; Ferguson, 2008; Payne, 2005; Finn and Jacobson, 2003b).

Ferguson (2008: 96) claims that social work contained from its inception 'a potential for radicalism which has, from time to time, been realised in theories and forms of practice which have challenged dominant methodologies'. There is much evidence of the fact that social workers have historically shown a readiness to defend a moral commitment to social change to achieve social justice. Social workers supported socialist movements and political parties and campaigned for civil and human rights, and against war in the early 20th century (Lundy, 2011; Healy, 2008). And they have challenged, throughout the profession's history, dominant theories and practices, questioning and rebelling against oppressive practices and ideologies of the organisations they worked in since the times of the Charity Organisation Society (C.O.S) (Ferguson, 2008: 91-92).

However, it was not until the 1970s that radical social work as a 'conscious and explicit approach to theory and practice' (Ferguson, 2008: 96) started to come on the scene in different parts of the world, including Latin American countries, the USA, Canada and the UK (Lundy, 2011; Ferguson, 2008; Payne, 2005; Finn and Jacobson, 2003b; Ander-Egg, 1972). This occurred in a period marked by a re-emergence of a capitalist economic crisis and widespread social rebellion and social movements, unseen since the 1930s Great Depression.

I discuss in more depth in chapter three some aspects of the radical social work movement with relevance for the contexts of social work in England and Spain. But the contributions radical social work brought to the profession in the 1970s and 1980s include: core ideas about social and economic structures' effects on inequality, oppression and class divisions; a critique of individualised and potentially pathologising interventions facing problems of social and structural origin; the promotion of group, community and collective work and action; a claim for closer relations between professionals and clients, and the encouragement of principles and values such as social justice, people's rights and human solidarity (Bamford, 2015; Lavalette, 2011; Lundy, 2011; Ferguson, 2008; Banks, 2006).

The most prominent critiques of the radical social work of the 1970s and 1980s, and of the currents of thought deriving from it, arguably relate mainly to its reported failure to engage with the diversity of oppressions and realities experienced by social work service users (Healy, 2005; Leonard, 2001). These include oppression on the grounds of race, gender, disability, religion, and sexual orientation. Other limitations, acknowledged from within the radical tradition, relate to its difficulties in materialising and adapting radical theories to social work practice (Lundy, 2011;

Ferguson, 2008). Radical social work has also been criticised for being too political, and for neglecting individual approaches and therapeutic interventions (Finn and Jacobson, 2003b).

During the 1980s, and coinciding with the advance of Thatcherite and Raeganite attacks on the welfare state (Dominelli, 2010: 22-3), the focus of analysis of oppression (from social work as well as from social movements and political thinking) shifted from class to the oppression experienced by diverse groups of people (Ferguson, 2008; Weinstein, 2011). This resulted in critical perspectives such as feminism, anti-racism and anti-discriminatory practice. See e.g. Dominelli's work on feminist (1989), anti-racist (1997) and anti-oppressive (2002) social work.

However, Ferguson (2008) argues, the incorporation with this turn of postmodern and post structural concepts to the analyses of oppression, eventually led to a paradigm shift towards postmodernism in social work of which some expressions, focusing on the politics of identity, have rejected the possibility and desirability of wider structural analysis in fragmented postmodern societies.

Mullaly (n.d. cited in Lundy 2011: 69) suggests that postmodernist ideology can be thought of as a continuum. At one end it is 'a conservative, individualistic and nihilistic doctrine, which holds that there is no potential for solidarity among oppressed persons or for social change' and at the other end provides grounds for a revitalisation and bettering of critical social theories. Whilst many authors with previous backgrounds in the radical tradition have welcomed postmodernism into the profession's debates and incorporated its ideas into their critical analysis (e.g. Healy, 2001; Leonard, 2001; Ife, 2001; 2008), others have been suspicious of postmodernist ideology identifying its contradictions and its resemblance to the fragmentation promoted by neo-liberalist doctrines (Lundy, 2011; Ferguson, 2008).

Critics of postmodernism argue that the ambiguity and ambivalence of terms and ideas such as 'oppression', 'empowerment' and 'social justice', allow for narrow interpretations of these concepts, redirecting analyses to the circumstances and perspectives of particular individuals, groups and communities, retreating from deeper analysis and from solidarity-based political and social action to combat social injustices (Payne, 2005: 153-154). And this has led to the devaluation and pathologisation of inequality and poverty (Fraser, 2000).

It can be argued that ambivalence in terminology makes issues of social justice, and those concerned with social justice, particularly vulnerable to ideological manipulation by neoliberal powers (including both conservative and social democratic governments). As an example, 'New Labour' in the UK, showed during more than a decade (1997-2010) its ability to undermine and

disguise the structural nature of inequalities and social problems whilst still claiming to be working for the empowerment of individuals and within frameworks of social justice (Ferguson, 2008; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2006; Dominelli, 2004). This was done through strategies such as constructing a moral panic, aided by the media, around welfare dependency or putting the blame on individuals and social services' professionals facing structurally originated social problems (Ferguson, 2008). Moreover, Ferguson and Lavalette (2006) have argued that New Labour sought to "reform" professions such as social work and community work by stepping up their regulation, education and practice and readjusting these to fit their political and economic purposes.

The vision for a social work for social justice is however grimmer under the governance of conservative, explicitly neoliberal governments, which often fail to see the possibility and relevance for social work in addressing social and global injustice.

A statement from a Conservative Health Secretary in the UK back in the 1990s serves to illustrate this:

Social work services are not about redressing the major injustices in our world. Their remit is not to battle with the major forces that drive social exclusion. It is to promote social inclusion of each individual within their circumstances (Sam Galbraith, cited in Ferguson, 2008).

More recently, the former Conservative Education Secretary Michael Gove strongly criticised social work education for encouraging social work students to see 'the individuals with whom they will work' as 'disempowered by society' and 'victims of social injustice'. This, he argued, is undesirable as it 'robs individuals of the power of agency and breaks the link between an individual's actions and the consequences' (Gove, 2013).

In response to neoliberal political developments such as these, social work organisations, practitioners and academics from different parts of the world have argued the need to reclaim and advance a renewed critical paradigm in the profession (IFSW Europe, 2010; Velasco Vázquez, 2012; Dominelli, 2007; Dominelli, 2010; Dominelli, 2004; Jones et al., 2004; Ife, 2009; Ife, 2001; Ife, 2008; Banks et al., 2008; Finn and Jacobson, 2003a; IASSW and IFSW, 2004; Healy, 2001; Leonard, 2001). 'Despite inevitable variations, regional particularities and the lack of homogeneity, large numbers of social workers in different parts of the world have expressed disapproval against the marketization of social services, professional imperialism and oppression towards service users' (Ioakimidis et al., 2014: 286). And social workers have demonstrated a readiness to develop new ways of working and thinking to help the profession and oppressed

local people 'resist [neoliberal] economic and political pressures' (Ferguson and Lavalette, 2006: 311; Ioakimidis et al., 2013).

O'Brien (2011: 177) countered claims that social justice was already 'dead' in social work, by reporting a number of ways in which he found social workers in New Zealand materialised their social justice ethical commitments in their daily work, based on a random survey of 710 social workers. Most social workers reported engagement with a series of anti-oppressive and advocacy micro-practices while only a small number had taken action at broader and political levels. Nonetheless, he concluded that although the profession needed to engage in greater efforts to address broader structural questions, the social workers in the study had never abandoned social justice commitments, and had upheld and 'kept alive' this social work value (O'Brien, 2011: 183-4). He asserted that this study addressed the question of 'how to encourage, build and sustain the social justice commitment of individual practitioners and, equally, if not more importantly, how to develop action by the profession and others to bring about change in economic, cultural and social structures in ways which enhance and advance social justice' (O'Brien, 2011: 186).

The IFSW and the IASSW (2014b; 2014a) have argued that a critical paradigm in social work, capable of confronting the discourse of the irreversible and uncontrollable character of economic globalization which has gained ground worldwide, should be built on the concepts of human rights and social justice, yet also on a sensitivity towards human diversity and internationalism. It also needs to engage with the democratization and de-colonization of social work knowledge (IFSW and IASSW, 2014b; IFSW and IASSW, 2014a). For social work practitioners to be able to (continue to) locate themselves within this framework, it is fundamental that schools of social work play the important part of making human rights and social justice central to social work education (Sewpaul and Jones, 2005; Méndez Fernández et al., 2006; Dominelli, 2010; Dominelli, 2007; Ife, 2008).

## A social work and social work education for social justice in the globalized world of the 21st century

Considering how to advance a human rights and social justice based social work facing the challenges from neoliberalism in local, national and international contexts of practice, the literature points to several areas of work and sources of strength from which the profession can draw in order to enhance practice, theory and education alongside these values. These areas span the sociological imagination: history, society, and life experiences of social work educators, students, practitioners and service users (Mills, 2000 [1959])

Eroles et al. (1997); Finn and Jacobson (2003b); Ife (2008); Pagaza et al. (2000) have pointed out the importance of paying attention to historical perspectives that tell us about recurring events (such as capitalism's crises) and social changes. A historical awareness can help prevent past mistakes and demonstrate that 'things can, and do, change'; that 'what may seem impossible today can become feasible tomorrow' (Ife, 2001: 14). Here there is much that can be learnt from Latin-American social work imagination and political struggles, marked by many of its countries' histories and influenced by models such as Freire's critical education or the Liberation Theology movement. From the Latin-American perspective, the profession is fully concerned with the advancement of real democracies, the promotion of spaces for participation, the real access for all to socially –produced material and cultural goods, the rejection of states' abandonment of their responsibility to support civil society, or the contribution to collective historical memory (CMOPTSSS, 2000, cited in Finn and Jacobson, 2003b; Eroles et al., 1997; Pagaza et al., 2000).

Dominelli (2010: 16) and Ife (2001), among others, have highlighted the importance of seeking a practice that connects the local and the global contexts and is empowering at both levels, which requires a deep and holistic understanding of our world and the causes of social work service users' problems. Such practice needs to be rooted 'in the local' for social workers to be able 'to respond to locality-specific demands and initiatives without oppressing those involved in the interaction' (Dominelli, 2010: 16). A practice rooted in the local would also mean 'a counteraction to a monopolistic and homogenising globalization' (Dominelli, 2016: 16). This holistic and complex understanding also involves linking the personal and the political at all levels of governance (Ife, 2001, 2008).

Lundy (2011) proposes and clarifies specific ways and methods by which structural social work towards social justice can be materialised in social work practice with individuals and families, groups and communities. She indicates how the social justice-oriented practices at these different levels link with one another and represent different dimensions of the multifaceted struggles

needed for a wider, structural social change. Lundy offers numerous examples (such as an exercise based on “a power flower” to understand intersectional oppression in group work) that illustrate how social workers can work with people at all these levels of practice so ‘they are able to more effectively engage in personal change as well as confront inadequate social and economic conditions’ (Lundy, 2011: 252). Methods and tools such as those that Lundy presents can be incorporated into social work education.

Furthermore, it is claimed that a critical practice for social change and social justice needs to engage with the democratisation and humanisation of social work knowledge in collaboration with local people in their contexts (e.g. Beresford and Croft, 2004; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2006; Ife, 2008). Creating links and sharing knowledge of common problems with social work colleagues in other parts of the world through emergent technological advances and means of communication (Ife, 2001: 13) and seeking social changes through ‘collective, participatory democratic action’ (Dominelli, 2010: 12) are also identified as key characteristics for contemporary critical social work.

Ferguson and Lavalette (2006: 312), for example, call for social workers to develop ‘a social work of resistance’ (to neoliberalism) and possibility. They encourage social workers, service users and social work students to join forces locally as well as with global social movements for social justice in order to play a part in the struggle for social justice at local and global levels, and to defend the profession from neoliberalism’s numerous attacks. These include attacks on the profession’s values, on relationships between social workers and clients, and on group, collective and structural approaches to practice. Concurring with the importance of collective social justice efforts in social work, O’Brien (2011: 186) asserts that the responsibility for developing future directions of structural social justice efforts ‘cannot sit solely with individual social workers, conflicted as they often are by the demands of their employers and pressing user needs’.

Palumbo and Friedman (2014) have recently analysed the strengths and tensions of the relationship between activism and social work, drawing from their experiences as activists and social work educators, and from qualitative research with social work students. Their conclusion is the following:

While neither social work nor activism nor any other form of protest and resistance can single-handedly engender utopia, this research has confirmed what our lived experiences have suggested: that individual connections, communities, social movements, educational models and radical alternatives must continue an engaged dialogue in order to constructively co-exist (Palumbo and Friedman, 2014: 97).

In the light of their research, Palumbo and Friedman (2014: 97) declare their commitment to: continue to 'occupy' and 'radicalise' social work education, in pursuit of 'the values inherent to anti-oppressive theory and practice' and of alternative (to neoliberalism) 'ways of knowing and creating'. Dudziak (2005) has documented how she 'tested the boundaries between academia and activism' by offering a critically reflective account of an experience of activism with a group of social work students in the anti-globalisation movement (around the Summit of the Americas, 2001, Quebec). In conclusion, she argues for a role for social work education in accompanying and supporting social work students in their social justice activism and efforts on the community and the streets. In doing so, she highlights Smith's call (1996, cited in Dudziak, 2005:22) to

let social workers, supported by schools of social work, attend the civil society ... there is a future to politics. There is a future to social work. These futures converge in efforts to support the civil sector locally and internationally

From anti-oppressive (poststructuralist) perspectives, Poole (2010), Wehbi and Straka (2010) and Bransford (2011) have documented their experiences of using reflective practice and group work in promoting social work students' involvement in social justice efforts for social transformation and change.

Poole (2010: 2-3) argues that social work students need to be supported to become aware of their position in society and the barriers and sources of support for engaging with social work action towards social justice, as a fundamental step for them to be able to engage with social justice struggles and 'hold on to [these] out there in a postwelfare world' and 'in social work organisations run under neoliberal management models'.

Wehbi and Straka (2010), drawing from the outcomes of a group activity carried out for four years with social work students, offer an overview of a series of barriers and facilitative factors for engaging with social justice efforts identified by students. These included external barriers such as structural oppression from racism, classism or homophobia, 'the operation of power in the national and international contexts' (capitalism, privatisation, etc.), oppressive theoretical frameworks and practice contexts in social work, lack of resources, or lack of belief in change. Internal barriers identified by students included internalised oppression, personal fears, lack of creativity, lack of a belief in change, stereotypes about social groups, shame or burnout (Wehbi and Straka, 2010: 50). Facilitative or supportive factors identified by students, included critical reflection, self-care, personal values, humour, passion, spirituality, awareness of power and, very importantly, supportive networks (family, friends, allies, etc.) Wehbi and Straka (2010: 52) claim that a key strength of this activity and the knowledge generated through it is that students were



not 'taught' about these barriers, but they were supported to collectively and safely identify them themselves.

Bransford (2011: 943) also highlights the critical importance in social work education of building safe environments for critical self-reflection and emotional engagement and development in order to help students develop the ability to perceive how 'public issues' are reflected in 'social work client's private troubles'.

Finally, but very importantly, in the social work literature there is ample and growing support for the view that a critical social work for social justice in the 21st century, urgently needs to engage with human rights and global citizenship perspectives (e.g. Dominelli, 2007; Dominelli, 2010; IASSW and IFSW, 2004; Ife, 2001: 10; Lundy, 2011; Reichert, 2003; United Nations, 1994). Social work is claimed to be a human rights profession which has explicitly and implicitly worked for the realisation of human rights and shares its values with broad human rights perspectives and movements (Dominelli, 2007; Healy, 2005; Ife, 2008; Reichert, 2003; United Nations, 1994).

Looking to the future, it is argued that the incorporation of broad human rights perspectives will allow the profession to find a privileged, solid way of seeking social justice, as human rights perspectives can offer guidance and a strong discourse in this direction (e.g. Dominelli, 2007; Ife, 2008). Human rights can be seen as the greatest human construction on which people in the world count nowadays for their defence against cruel treatment, injustice, and oppression. And they offer social work a unique discourse of hope for countering the neoliberal ideology that distances it from its social justice foundations. Thus, human rights are central in bringing vision, direction and hope for a better world, even in facing the realities of the contemporary complex and deeply unjust world.

In the next section of the chapter I explore the relationship between social work and human rights (including historical developments), and the implications and possibilities of a human rights based social work practice towards a greater social justice in the 21st century.

## Social Work and Human Rights

In this second part of the literature review I focus on human rights in social work and social work education. First, I offer an introduction to the concept of human rights, and explore the history, strengths and contradictions of the United Nations human rights developments. Then, I give an overview of the history of human rights in social work and, as in the previous social justice section, I finally consider current issues, current research about teaching human rights in social work education, and the direction and possibilities of human rights approaches in social work.

### Introduction: Why human rights? What human rights?

Social work has, from its conception, been a human rights profession, having as its basic tenet the intrinsic value of every human being and as one of its main aims the promotion of equitable social structures, which can offer people security and development while upholding their dignity (IFSW, 1988, cited in Healy, 2008: 737)

As the IFSW stated in 1988, social work and human rights are deeply linked. Social work is claimed to be a 'human rights profession' (Healy, 2008; IFSW-Europe, 2012: 5; United Nations, 1994; Wronka and Staub-Bernasconi, 2012a: 70) and it is argued to have a human rights tradition 'of more than 100 years', which is however 'mostly unknown' (Staub-Bernasconi, 2016: 40).

It is claimed that there are incontestable similarities between social work's mission and values and human rights language and discourses, as reflected in worldwide codes of social work ethics, official statements and theoretical developments (Reichert, 2003; Healy, 2008; Banks, 2006). However, this fundamental relationship tended to be implicit in the profession before the late 1980s.

In more recent years, however, human rights perspectives have gained prominence in the statements and agendas of International Social Work organisations (IASSW and IFSW, 2004; IFSW, 2000; IFSW and IASSW, 2014b; IFSW-Europe, 2012; Sewpaul and Jones, 2005; Jones and Truell, 2015) and social work theory internationally. Many claim these offer a unique discourse for strengthening and unifying the profession, enabling it to face the challenges brought about by the pervasive effects of a neoliberal capitalism and globalization (e.g. Huegler et al., 2012; Ife, 2008; Staub-Bernasconi, 2011). These challenges link with social problems deriving from increasing inequalities, poverty, social exclusion and cultural and religious conflicts and violence (Sewpaul, 2016). Sewpaul (2016: 32) has recently highlighted how, 'within the [global] neoliberal framework':

social and economic exclusions are fostered by the process of othering, based on criteria such as “race”, religion, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality and gender, and refugees and asylum seekers are deemed to be the undeserving other, which is accentuated in the existing climate of global terrorism and Islamophobia.

In this global context, it is argued, a human rights approach can on the one hand strengthen the different social work emancipatory and change responses under a common framework (Cemlyn, 2008; Ife, 2008; Méndez Fernández et al., 2006; Reichert, 2003) and, on the other hand, reposition social work as a human rights profession with a particular role to fulfil in the worldwide collective struggle for human rights and social justice (together with other disciplines, professions and social movements) (IFSW-Europe, 2012; Ife, 2008; Ife, 2016)

It is also claimed that rediscovering human rights perspectives in social work can bring the profession a discourse of unity and purpose with which social workers of different national and cultural backgrounds can identify (Méndez Fernández et al., 2006; United Nations, 1994; Banks et al., 2008). This can provide the profession with greater depth and richness (Gore, 1968, cited in Healy, 2008), and strengthen the basis for dialogue, solidarity and cooperation among social workers beyond national and cultural boundaries (Méndez Fernández et al., 2006; United Nations, 1994; Banks et al., 2008: 287-288).

However, Jim Ife, a leading author in the field of social work and human rights, has recently argued that there is not a single “story” or discourse of human rights and hence, ideas about human rights based social work (and social work education) are contested and open to debate (Ife, 2016).

Ife (2016) argues that whilst there has been a dominance of conventional legal—based understandings of human rights in Western social work, deriving from the European Enlightenment and UN developments of human rights instruments and law, there are alternative understandings of a human rights based social work, which, putting the focus on “the human” go beyond, and may question, human rights law. He argues for social workers not to limit themselves to an uncritical acceptance of the “liberal individualist legal story” of human rights where ‘human collectivities’ such as ‘families, communities, gangs, religious congregations’ do not have a part despite being fundamental in defining our humanity (Ife, 2016: 6). Instead, he encourages social workers to engage with and contribute to a “relationship- based social story” of human rights as ‘this, after all, is the world that *social* workers inhabit, understand, and practise in’ (Ife, 2016:7).

In a similar vein (and arguably influenced by Ife’s previous work) , the IFSW-Europe (2012: 38), in a relevant publication called *Standards in Social Work Practice meeting Human Rights*, claimed that

human rights approaches facilitate the integration of social work within wider human rights movements and struggles, and promote its external recognition as a human rights profession with particular key roles to fulfil in cooperation with other disciplines and social agents. According to the IFSW-Europe (2012), these roles derive from social work's action orientation and in its dual mission of seeking social change whilst assisting the particular needs of individuals, families, groups and communities for the greater wellbeing of all people.

Whilst social workers have long been joining human rights campaigns and consciously contributing to upholding the legal field of human rights through their practice, much of the theoretical focus currently lies in the development of social work's broader, relationship-based, understanding of human rights in the social problems and lives of the people social workers work with. The new international journal *Human Rights and Social Work* launched in 2016 (Springer, 2016) offers good examples of the most recent developments in this field. It is arguably this 'social' (Ife, 2016) approach to human rights which links more closely with social justice concepts and ideas and therefore a key focus of interest for this research.

Nonetheless, as acknowledged by the IFSW-Europe (2012) and numerous authors developing broader social work human rights approaches (e.g. (Ife, 2016; Wronka and Staub-Bernasconi, 2012a; Huegler et al., 2012), engaging with human rights in social work is a challenging task which requires a basic understanding of the legal aspects of human rights as well as the United Nations Human Rights developments and instruments. Therefore, in the next section I briefly explore these areas before moving on to consider more specific literature on human rights in social work and social work education.

## An introduction to legal developments in human rights history and the UN promotion of Human Rights.

In contemporary accounts of the history of the United Nations engagement with human rights, the explicit emergence of human rights as a conceptual category is usually traced back to the European Enlightenment and the 18th century French and American revolutions (Ife, 2016). It is often noted, however, that the origins of core human rights elements can be found in Greek philosophy, various world religions, and Western and non-Western cultures and societies throughout history (Sepúlveda et al., 2004; IFSW-Europe, 2012).

These accounts indicate that before the 18th century, several charters codifying rights and freedoms in different parts of the world had constituted important steps towards the idea of human rights. These include England's *Magna Charta Liberatum* of 1215 and the Netherlands' *Union of Utrecht* of 1579 (Reichert, 2003: 20-21; Sepúlveda et al., 2004: 3). However, it is argued (Sepúlveda et al., 2004: 3) that in these charters rights were seen as privileges deriving from 'rank or status', rather than as freedoms of individuals as human beings. The decisive development of inherent human rights is attributed to Enlightenment philosophers such as J. Locke (1632-1704) or J. Rousseau (1712-1778) (Dominelli, 2007; Reichert, 2003: 22; Sepúlveda et al., 2004: 3-4). Around the 18th century:

man/woman came to be seen as an autonomous individual, endowed by nature with certain inalienable fundamental rights that could be invoked against a government and should be safeguarded by it. Human rights were henceforth seen as elementary preconditions for an existence worthy of human dignity. (Sepúlveda et al. (2004: 3)

Sepúlveda et al. (2004: 4) go on to discuss how by the end of the 18th century, the American *Declaration of Independence* (1776) and the French *Declaration des Droits de l' Homme et du Citoyen* of 1789 already reflected 'the emergent international theory of universal rights' relating to the freedom of any individual to live and pursue happiness freely.

With the advance of industrialization in Europe and the United States along the late 18th and 19th centuries, and the reactions against the exploitative and unsanitary work and living conditions of poor workers (including women and children), ideas about governments' responsibilities towards the improvement of citizens' living conditions began to spread in Europe (Sepúlveda et al., 2004: 4; Reichert, 2003: 23-24). In the same period social rights related to employment, welfare, education or public health started to be outlined and presented to governments as a matter of social justice from different perspectives, such as Marxist or Christian democratic ideals and organisations (Eroles et al., 1997). The ideals regarding governments' responsibilities to

guaranteeing social rights started to permeate European government ideologies in the late 18th century reflected in several European constitutions including the French Declaration of 1789. These ideals spread across the world during the following centuries, being incorporated into various constitutions such as those of Mexico (1917) and the Soviet Union (1918) (Eroles et al., 1997; Jackson, 2005; Sepúlveda et al., 2004: 4; Reichert, 2003: 24).

By the late 19th century and early 20th century (when the social work profession was emerging and starting to expand) a need for international human rights standards and international collaboration was expressed in industrialised countries (Reichert, 2003: 24-25). The need for development of labour legislation to regulate international competition, international conflict about the protection of minority rights (Sepúlveda et al., 2004) and, more importantly the World War I (1914-1918), brought to attention the international interdependence of human beings and the need to establish agreements and bases for cooperation beyond national boundaries (Reichert, 2003: 24).

Nevertheless, as virtually all accounts of the UN Human Rights history attest, it was the atrocities of World War II (1939-1945), that eventually forced recognition of the need to limit states' liberty in the treatment of their citizens, and to establish a minimum basis for a more humane world (Dominelli, 2007; Sepúlveda et al., 2004: 5; United Nations, 1994; Wronka and Staub-Bernasconi, 2012a; United Nations, 2016; British Institute of Human Rights, 2016). The newly constituted United Nations (UN) organisation introduced human rights in the sphere of international law by the signing in 1945 of the Charter of the UN, and the subsequent formulation of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) in 1948. (Sepúlveda et al., 2004: 5; United Nations, 1994: 7).

The UNDHR was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948 and signed by all the member countries of the United Nations during following decades (58 in 1948, and virtually all countries in the world at the present time (United Nations, 2016)).

The human rights established by the UNDHR include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and reflect the commitment of countries across the world to settle the basis of a new world order in which the horrors of World War II could not be repeated and poverty would be alleviated. (Dominelli, 2007; Finn and Jacobson, 2003a: 125-126; Ife, 2008; Ife, 2009; Reichert, 2003; United Nations, 1949; United Nations, 1994).

Analyses of the UNDHR commonly divide rights into three sets or generations: 1) *negative rights* relating to political and individual freedoms that restrict governments' roles and conduct

towards citizens; 2) *positive rights* that ensure governments seek to grant all citizens the best living standards the resources of the countries allow; and 3) *collective rights* that require solidarity and cooperation among nations on global issues and development.

For many commentators, this classification of human rights also reflects the order in which these have progressively developed and gained relevance in the human rights arena and societies' consciousness (Lundy, 2011; Salinas Ramos, 2003; Sepúlveda et al., 2004; United Nations, 1994). Nonetheless, it has been argued that this understanding of human rights evolution is problematic being inconsistent with principles of interdependence and indivisibility emphasised in the UNDHR, and reflecting Western political- economic hegemony (Evans and Ayers, 2006).

Since the 50s, the UNDHR's principles and statements, not legally binding in themselves due to the nonbinding nature of declarations, have been developed through international and regional treaties (covenants and conventions that must be incorporated into the legislation of signatory countries). These address: civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; elimination of racial discrimination and discrimination against women, protection from torture and enforced disappearance, and the promotion of rights of children, people with disabilities and other oppressed groups.

The implementation of these treaties is promoted and monitored by the United Nations and regional organisations such as the Council of Europe, alongside non-governmental human rights organisations (International Amnesty and Human Rights Watch are examples of these). Whilst there is no space in this literature review to expand further on human rights instruments, it is noted that detailed and accurate guidance for social workers is available from sources including Reichert (2003); Reichert (2007), the IFSW website, or the Sage Handbook of International Social Work (Huegler et al., 2012).

Some of the main critiques of the UN approach to human rights are represented by claims that the UN approach to human rights suffers from a Western ideological bias and political domination. Evans and Ayers (2006: 289) claim that prevailing UN human rights discourses, which highlight a dichotomy of civil/political and economic/social/cultural rights represent and serve Western political-economic interests. They contend that this dichotomy 'has been co-opted by the prevailing (neo) liberal consensus in support of processes associated with capitalist globalization' (Evans and Ayers, 2006: 289). And they assert that:

With the demise of the Eastern bloc, and formal marginalization of the so-called Third World, the (neo)liberal consensus upon which the practices of globalization are built has succeeded in establishing the language of so-called civil and political rights as the acceptable voice—indeed the

only legitimate voice—of human rights talk... For (neo)liberals, economic, social and cultural claims embodied in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights—the right to employment and just conditions of work, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to be free from hunger, and so on—may be legitimate aspirations but they can never be rights (Evans and Ayers, 2006: 291).

Evans and Ayers (2006: 289) argue that the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideology is such that ‘the triad of human rights, free markets and democracy’ is accepted as the desirable and attainable political target worldwide, even when readjustments for the advance of free market involve severe transition costs to some groups (Evans and Ayers, 2006: 291-2).

The humanistic assumptions that underlie and define the UNDHR and the UN approach to human rights, as well as the Western logic, style and language that characterises these, have also been subjected to significant criticisms from both the non-Western world and from intellectual traditions in the West, such as poststructuralism, postmodernism and feminism. Ife (2009: 71) points out how ‘humanism, despite its important advances in the valuing of humanity, has also been inextricably bound up with the agenda of patriarchal Western imperialism/colonialism’. ‘It valued the human.... but in such a way that inevitably some humans were seen as more worthy and important than others’ (Ife, 2009: 71).

Criticisms of Western hegemony have highlighted the fact that grandiose humanistic traditions and ideals have coexisted throughout history with exploitative practices such as colonization, slavery and the subordination of women to men, and that expressions of many of these exploitative mechanisms continue to be embedded in contemporary Western philosophies. These criticisms have unravelled and brought to light important biases in Western humanistic traditions that include: individualistic and anthropocentric biases that artificially separate human beings from one another and from the natural world (Ife, 2009; Ife, 2008; Dominelli, 2010); the difficulties of Western philosophy and culture in understanding, respecting, valuing and incorporating diversity (Moosa-Mitha, 2005); and the limitations of Western thought and morality in dealing with the holism and complexity of the world and experiences of human lives (Banks, 2006; Dominelli, 2010; Ife, 2008; Sen, 1999).

Another set of criticisms of UN human rights focuses on the limited enforceability of human rights treaties and declarations. Preston-Shoot and Höjer (2012: 5) have argued that, with their implementation ultimately depending on nation-states, UN human rights declarations ‘may be more honoured in the breach than the observance’. National powers can violate human rights themselves or lack the means for their enforcement, for example in exploitative trade arrangements by international organisations and corporations (Dominelli, 2007; Ife, 2016).



Moreover, it is claimed that nation-bound human rights machinery raises significant issues in relation to the divide between the rights of citizens and non-citizens. Dominelli (2007: 9) points out that when human rights are applied only to some residents of a country, this jeopardises human rights legitimacy based on their 'direct tie to being human'.

Despite these shortcomings of the UN human rights approach, the UNDHR and its developments have undeniably been 'one of the great achievements of the 20th century' (Ife, 2009: 79) and 'nothing short of a revolution in thought' whose unprecedented scope and adherence has exceeded any previous efforts to establish rights and the basis for cooperation beyond borders (Reichert, 2003: 18-19). And as Ife has argued: 'the world is undoubtedly a better place because of human rights laws, human rights instruments, human rights lawyers and the [UN] human rights movement' (Ife, 2016: 5).

Since the UNDHR, the UN have promoted and founded significant human rights organisations and programmes, and inspired many other social movements and organisations to act against the human rights violations of diverse persons and groups. The UN have thus contributed directly and indirectly to efforts to combat many different causes of men women and children of different races suffering cruel treatment, exploitation, discrimination, or oppression through slavery, inhuman treatment, incarceration, famine and so on.

Whilst it is fundamental to recognise and counter expressions of Western hegemony in the UN's politics and approach to human rights, the UNDHR was drafted with the participation of worldwide leaders. These included from the very beginning representatives from the non-Western countries of China, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Chile and Lebanon together with leaders from the U.S.A, France, UK and Canada (Banks et al., 2008; Staub-Bernasconi, 2016; United Nations, 2016; Reichert, 2007).

Reichert (2003: 26) has also pointed out that it is important to acknowledge that, even if formulated differently, many core aspirations and elements of human rights were present in Western and non-Western cultures long before the UNDHR, and, therefore, it would be a serious mistake to attribute human rights developments solely to the humanistic Western tradition (Reichert, 2003: 26). Banks et al (Banks et al., 2008: 287-288) have pointed out how UN human rights declarations after the UNDHR have had an increasing input from different countries throughout the world in their formulation. Banks and they have also highlighted how different religions and regions of the world have produced a series of human rights statements, which contextualise human rights within various cultural and religious identities (Banks et al., 2008: 287-

288). These include the Asian Human Rights Charter (1998) and the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (1980).

Ife (2008) claims that beyond the UN's approach to human rights, yet largely as a result of this, human rights ideals around people's shared humanity have spread to the collective consciousness in different parts of the world and become a global and emancipatory force against injustices. This is a force capable of surpassing borders, cultures and other human divisions, and of prompting dialogue, human cooperation and peaceful coexistence around what unites human beings across the world (Ife, 2008). Moreover, Ife (2009: 80) claims, human rights discourses seem to constitute 'one of the few legitimate alternatives to the dominant discourses of neoliberalism, unbridled capitalism, economic globalization, individualism and the free market' which legitimate the primacy of market interests against the interests and wellbeing of societies and their citizens.

Banks et al. argue that in the context of discussions of human rights in social work, the profession can be considered on two levels: 'On one level, it is a professional practice necessarily rooted in particular nation states, cultures, and legal and policy frameworks. At another level it is also an international social movement, concerned to work for social justice worldwide' (Banks et al., 2008: 288). Both levels of the profession arguably have strong human rights implications. Upholding human rights through social work practice at the two levels requires an understanding of human rights that involves, and must go beyond, a solid knowledge of individual rights (Banks et al., 2008: 288) and 'conventional legal-based human rights narratives for social work' (Ife, 2016: 1) associated with the UN human rights legalistic approach. The role of social work education becomes fundamental in achieving this (Dominelli, 2007).

## History of human rights in social work

Staub-Bernasconi (2016: 40) has recently summarised the human rights tradition in social work history up to the present time:

Mostly unknown in Europe and perhaps also in other regions of the world is that social work has a tradition of human rights of more than 100 years -first present in writings, second as accounts of and about human rights activists and then getting "institutionalised" in many common documents of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) (Staub-Bernasconi, 2016:40).

Healy (2008: 737), writing along similar lines, had asserted that social work's involvement in human rights can be traced from social work's 'official documents indicating the compatibility of the profession's mission and values with human rights; the contribution of social work leaders to

human rights causes; official professional representation and action on human rights; and social work involvement in critical incidents or major human rights movements’.

It is argued that pioneer social workers were clearly influenced by ideas of universal human rights that were contributing to the social and intellectual climate in Europe by the time of the social work profession’s emergence at the end of the 19th century. This influence became particularly prominent in relation to the atrocities of World War I, at the beginning of the 20th century (Reichert, 2003: 24-25). In this climate, they saw the need to establish a common knowledge and value base for an international social work profession, and to establish mechanisms and organise for international, national and regional cooperation among social workers. These developments included the creation, in the first decades of the 20th century, of the International Conference of Social Welfare (current ICSW), the International Committee of Social Work (current IASSW), and the International Permanent Secretariat of Social Workers (now IFSW). (Dominelli, 2010; Reichert, 2003: 24-25; United Nations, 1994: 7)

Social work founders and leaders were involved in human rights movements and international organisations like the League of Nations, the Red Cross and Save the Children (Healy, 2008; Reichert, 2003: 31). Social work pioneers such as Jane Addams (USA, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931), Eglantyne Jebb (UK), Alice Salomon (Germany) and Bertha Reynolds (USA) made very important contributions to the struggles for human rights including women’s rights, education, children rights and peace (Healy, 2008). Many of these leaders showed a familiarity with the term human rights and related ideas in their work and speeches. Bertha Reynolds, for example, called on US social Workers in a National Conference of Social Work in 1940 to ‘join hands with every honest fighter for peace and human rights’ and to ‘not be moved’ from this position (Reynolds, 1940, cited in Healy, 2008: 739).

However, it is argued that as these human rights ideas and values were formally expressed in social work codes of ethics and teaching materials, an explicit human rights language became increasingly lost, leading to a generalised lack of attention to the links between human rights and social work practice, theory and teaching (United Nations, 1994; Dominelli, 2007).

Healy (2008: 742) argues that with the huge milestone in the advancement of international human rights brought about by the UNDHR (1948), some specific references to human rights slowly started to re-enter the profession, but these tended to be rare for decades. She attributes one of the causes for this to the fact that, despite social work’s interest in human rights, social workers ‘have usually paid more attention to human needs than to human rights’ and ‘focused on

emergency, action oriented human needs efforts, leaving human rights policy to others' (Healy, 2008: 745). For example, she highlights that when the UNDHR was drafted and adopted, the profession's interest and involvement in international human rights developments focused on war relief programmes in Europe and China and on initiating emerging UNICEF child welfare programmes.

There are nevertheless documented accounts of social workers and social work leaders' involvement in the Civil Rights movement in the USA, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the non-violent tradition of Ghandi, campaigns for the rights of indigenous people, and other forms of activism with a clear reference to human rights in different parts of the world (Staub-Bernasconi, 2016: 41-42; Healy, 2008: 739-740; Ife, 2016: 2). Moreover, it is claimed that, given the interdisciplinarity of the human rights field, many important contributions by social workers to human rights struggles will never have been linked to the profession (Healy, 2008: 740).

However, it is argued (Healy, 2008; IFSW-Europe, 2012) that since the establishment in 1988 of an IFSW International Commission on Human Rights, human rights started to be explicitly addressed and have become increasingly prominent in international social work. Other reported milestones in that direction are the publication by the UN in 1994 of a guide on human rights and social work (as a result of a collaboration between the UN, IFSW and IASSW) and the assertion in the IFSW (2000) definition of social work that 'principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental in/to social work'. Subsequent statements and policy developments by international social work organisations have drawn on this (United Nations, 1994; IASSW and IFSW, 2004; IFSW, 2000; IFSW and IASSW, 2014b; <http://www.globalsocialagenda.org/>). Alongside this, there has been an increased involvement of social workers and social work academics globally in the development of human rights based social work theory and practice models (IFSW-Europe, 2012).

The IFSW-Europe (2012)'s *Standards in Social Work Practice meeting Human Rights* is another recent document which contains helpful highlights about the human rights tradition and developing body of human rights knowledge in social work, as well as helpful guidelines on ways to implement human rights through social work practice. This document acknowledged that translating human rights into the social work profession, and especially into daily social work practice, is a challenging task that requires knowledge of human rights legal instruments and broader perspectives as well as an understanding of how these link with social work theory and practice. And it argued that despite some progress 'more awareness needs to be raised regarding the activities of Social Work as human rights practice' (IFSW- Europe, 2012: 38).

Since the publication of the IFSW-Europe human rights guide (2012), efforts for the development of a human rights based social work value base, theory and practice have continued to evolve and have gained prominence in the social work profession globally. The 2014 Global definition of social work (IFSW and IASSW, 2014b) and associated statements and documents reflect the centrality of human rights in the social work profession. Drawing from this definition and from the human rights standards and guidance of lead international social work organisations (notably the IFSW and IASSW), the professional social work associations in the United Kingdom and Spain updated their codes of ethics in 2014 and have taken significant steps to promote human rights based approaches to social work.

The Spanish national association of social work *Consejo de Trabajo Social (CGTS)* has fulfilled a fundamental role in coordinating collective social work responses to the economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures from 2010 to the present time. Human rights based approaches and language have characterised the analysis, statements, denunciation campaigns and collective actions of the CGTS in recent years. For example, during 2015 they carried out a campaign to raise consciousness about social rights and how these are violated through cuts and denial of support services for the most vulnerable people in Spain. One of the activities involved support for three Spanish families to protest in the European Parliament after losing support services. A documentary about these families and their journey was produced and disseminated widely by the CGTS, during 2015 (CGTS, 2010). Human rights language and discourses are also widespread in broader anti-austerity social movements and protests which have developed in recent years in Spain.

In the UK, social work professional bodies have arguably been slower in starting to acknowledge and embrace guidance on human rights based social work approaches. However, the publication in 2015 of the BASW Human Rights Policy (BASW, 2015) can be seen as an important move in this direction. This policy is aimed at defining a human rights based social work ‘as defined in the international definition of social work’, and ‘to help social workers ... to find ways of practising that are consistent with a common commitment to be part of an international human rights profession’ (BASW, 2015: 4).

This policy asserts that human rights approaches involve ‘increasing the ability of those with responsibility for fulfilling rights to recognise and respect human rights (for example in the NHS, local authorities, or care providers), ‘empowering people to know and claim their rights’ and ‘understanding the specific cultural contexts in which discrimination occurs’ (BASW, 2015: 7). This last point, the policy specifies, ‘requires analysis of the structural causes of discrimination and

poverty, rather than only its symptoms, and of the impact of governmental action or inaction on communities experiencing poverty' (BASW, 2015: 7).

Whilst arguably more careful than the open and radical commitment to a human rights based social work reflected in the Spanish CGTS language, this policy document can be seen as a move from what Ife (2016) calls "conventional legal-based human rights narratives for social work" which focus on the individual, towards a complementary and more human focused, progressive, and collective narrative of human rights.

## Human rights and social work in the globalized world of 21st century

As Social Work looks to the future, the profession has an opportunity to assert its human rights focus more clearly. The strong compatibility of the profession's mission and values with human rights suggests a natural linkage. Human rights provide the profession with a clear direction for a presence at the international level, while also bridging local and national issues with global concerns (IFSW-Europe, 2012: 38).

Nowadays, social work's commitment to human rights and social justice is clear and permeates the profession's codes of ethics worldwide. However, it is argued that in the case of human rights, a lack of explicit links with the profession has hindered the full understanding and incorporation of human rights notions in social work practice, theory and education (Lundy, 2011: 29; Dominelli, 2007; Cemlyn, 2008; Reichert, 2003: 232). Nonetheless, this seems to be changing as professional associations and an increasing number of social work stakeholders reclaim the ethical mandate and urgent need for a definitive incorporation of critical human rights perspectives within social work theory and practice.

In globalized societies, the profession has been faced in recent decades with increasingly complex social problems affecting its service users, and changed contexts at local and international levels. Social workers are operating in contexts marked by an increasingly unjust global social order in which the advance of neoliberal forms of globalization is bringing about systematic structural violations of the human rights of an ever-growing number of populations (affecting most severely the most vulnerable groups of people within these) while at the same time reducing the possibilities of social work responses to social change.

In such contexts, the urgent need for social work to adopt human rights perspectives to strengthen the profession and enable social workers to work within human rights and social justice frameworks is clear. But translating and integrating human rights into social work theory and practice raises numerous questions and challenges, many of which have barely been

explored. These questions relate for example to the role of social workers as human rights workers, to the methods to achieve and advance human rights through social work practice, or to the role of social work education in preparing social work students to engage with human rights based social work.

## The human rights role of social workers

Regarding to the role of social workers in relation to human rights, Gore, (1969, cited in Staub-Bernasconi, 2011: 10) writing from an Indian perspective suggested that

It is a role that differs from that of a rebel and also from the one of a repairman (or repairwoman) .... Yet, it compels the profession to see beyond the fashions and prejudices of the present so as to identify and promote instrumental values and practices necessary for the realization of the goals of human dignity and equality.... It will disturb the complacency of the individual social worker who may be tempted to acquiesce in the values of the local community even when they conflict with the broader values of the profession. It will require and compel the organized profession to take clear positions on social issues...

This quote introduces a key implication of a human rights based social work, the profession's foremost ethical bond with human rights (including social justice). Wronka and Staub-Bernasconi (2012a: 81) argue that the ethical bond between human rights and social work involves an additional mandate for the profession extending the two classic mandates of care and control. The human rights mandate, they assert, provides the profession with autonomy and 'allows for the modification or refusal of illegitimate claims and mandates from society, social agencies and clients' (Wronka and Staub-Bernasconi, 2012a: 81). 'Ultimately', Wronka and Staub-Bernasconi (2012a: 81) suggest, 'the triple mandate [to agency, the clients and the profession human rights values] could move critical or radical social work from its marginal position into the centre of social work'.

Ife (2008: 188) has pointed out that it is not only important for social workers to understand human rights and be able to create and implement interventions for achieving these, but it is similarly important that 'the profession itself operate in such a way that its own practices observe human rights principles and do not violate the human rights of others'. He explains how social workers can both enhance or violate the human rights of different people in their practice, regardless of the rhetoric on the foundations and aims guiding it. And he revises the human rights implications of several aspects of: the language of social work (labelling clients, professionalism, military metaphors, etc.); the processes of social work (interventions, groups, community processes, planning, management, boundaries, supervision); the structures of social work (the role of clients, and organizational and professional structures and processes); and the education of social workers. In this regard, Preston-Shoot and Höjer (2012: 15) argue that social

work's commitment to human rights and social justice requires practitioners to reflect on 'whether or not they have become complicit in legitimizing inequalities' and draws attention to the well documented fact that '... such reflection may well conclude that social work has perhaps a mixed track record in respect of advocating for social justice and human rights'.

In relation to social work education, Méndez Fernández et al. (2006) concur with Ife (2008) that means and ends cannot be separated in a social work practice and education respectful of human rights. Méndez Fernández et al. (2006) have argued that teaching human rights requires social work educators to have a broad knowledge of human rights perspectives. But they also need to implement these through education styles, practices, and attitudes consistent with human rights. This involves, in their view, sharing power with students and empowering them to examine their own lives to promote their personal development. In addition, Méndez Fernández et al. (2006: 22-23) highlight the importance of practice education as a platform to prepare students for non-discriminatory social work practice committed and aligned with human rights. They emphasise that placement supervision is a key place to help students analyse practice in human rights terms, linking theory to practice, promoting critical thinking and an analysis of contradictions and challenges to the incorporation of human rights in social work practice. The IFSW-Europe (2012) recognises the complexity of the environments in which social workers practice, acknowledging that addressing difficult circumstances and active service in social work involves dealing with practice situations and dilemmas which no standards or codes of ethics can predict or automatically resolve. Social workers therefore inevitably need to: i) engage with complexity thinking, ii) balance and prioritize a number of factors, rights and needs, and iii) face moral dilemmas (IFSW-Europe, 2012; Banks, 2006).

Staub-Bernasconi (2011: 9) notes that standing up for human rights through social work practice may require 'civil courage to stand up against actors in a power structure' and asserts that in more extreme situations, this may pose serious career and safety threats. Preston-Shoot and Höjer (2012: 19) have highlighted how when it comes to 'speaking up against malpractice or mismanagement', there are important constraints of a different nature for social work and social workers' assertion of human rights. Amongst these, they outline a series of pressures that may apply to less threatening contexts but which contribute to a 'culture of silence in human service organisations' that may hinder social workers' commitment to human rights-based ethical practice (Preston-Shoot and Höjer, 2012: 19).



Some of these pressures, which may apply to social work practice contexts in England and/or Spain are:

- Close political links and dependence on government funding;
- Social work being an emergent profession in some countries whilst under threat in others;
- Protection of the profession, to maintain its legitimacy;
- High workloads and poor working conditions, including erratic supervision, within agencies which are bureaucratic and functional in organization rather than rights-based or values-oriented;
- Low regard; variable and often ambivalent public image; public sector location; low status of service users; lack of specific definition of social work;
- Social justice and human need seen as technical rather than social or political problems;
- Inadequate theoretical orientation and lack of identification with human rights, suggesting there may not be a common professional project in respect of social justice;

(Preston-Shoot and Höjer, 2012: 19)

The BASW (2015) Human Rights Policy arguably establishes an empowering and protective framework for UK social workers' engagement with human rights through their professional practice. An interesting assertion at the beginning of the document is that 'this policy seeks to recognize and address that "human rights" as they have been passed into legislation in the UK have often been given a narrower meaning than the understanding social workers have as a profession' (BASW, 2015:4). The policy document then offers a definition and background information about human rights and social work, followed by the actual policy (practical guiding principles) for social workers' engagement with human rights in their practice settings. The guidance is structured around the practice implications of the character of human rights as a) *universal*, b) *inalienable* and c) *indivisible*.

This policy (BASW, 2015) aligns well with social work's 'third mandate' to a human rights bound ethical practice (Wronka and Staub-Bernasconi, 2012a: 81), acknowledging social workers' individual and collective obligations towards human rights, and establishing that 'social workers should ask themselves, their organisations and stakeholders questions about whether practice is complying with human rights principles and whether actions are necessary and proportionate in each individual case' (BASW, 2015: 19). Moreover, it sets an obligation for employers of social workers to ensure that social workers 'do not face discrimination or detriment arising from their advocating for the human rights of those with whom they work, including where such advocacy is contrary to the financial, reputational or other interest of the employer' (BASW, 2015: 22).

## Methods and models for human rights based social work practice and education

The differentiation between narrower and broader understandings of human rights in social work is relevant in discussions about the methods for human rights based social work practice found in the literature. Wronka and Staub-Bernasconi (2012a: 19), for example, assert that:

For the narrower conception of human rights protection, one needs close cooperation with lawyers; for the broad conception, one can use various social work methods such as resource mobilization, consciousness raising, mediation, and empowerment. More specific methods include using the official instruments of the UN for complaints, monitoring, lobbying, and, more and more, also whistle blowing. But in many cases, one needs civil courage to stand up against actors in a power structure.

Also in relation to the methods and ways forward for linking social work and human rights, Ife (2008: 152) explains that social workers can connect human rights with their practice through deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive approach involves asking what particular statements and rights mean for practice and then translating these into guiding principles for a human rights practice. Inductive approaches on the other hand, depart from practice situations and demand consideration of 'what are the human rights issues at stake' to inform and enhance practice. In reality, social workers can use both approaches each informing the other (idea of praxis). I find this categorization helpful for framing an analysis on the literature in this regard and use it to structure the following sub-section of the review (human rights methods and models).

### Deductive (top-down) use of human rights instruments in social work

Ife (2008: 153-154) argues that social workers can use formal documents such as the UNDHR and other human rights documents and legislation in different spheres of research, practice and teaching referring to their legal moral and inspirational force for human rights causes. However, he clarifies that working deductively does not necessarily mean to learn and accept these documents literally, working with them from the position of expert, since there is room for involving communities, groups, individuals and social work students, in dialogue to transform human rights documents into accessible formulations more coherent with their understandings, life experiences and concerns (Ife, 2008: 153-155).

Reichert (2003) also refers to the need and potential for social workers to know and use human rights instruments as a guide for a human rights social work practice. She claims that social work codes of ethics (particularly the American National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of

ethics) can be seen and used as part of these human rights instruments as they adhere to and resemble formalised human rights documents such as the UNDHR.

The Global Standards for social work education (Sewpaul, 2005) highlight a series of epistemological paradigms of global relevance for the training of social workers prepared to practise according to the profession's commitment to human rights and social justice (as specified in the 2000 international definition of social work (IFSW, 2000). These are:

- An acknowledgement and recognition of the dignity, worth and the uniqueness of all human beings.
- Recognition of the inter-connectedness that exists within and across all systems at micro, mezzo and macro levels.
- An emphasis on the importance of advocacy and changes in socio-structural, political and economic conditions that disempower, marginalize and exclude people.
- A focus on capacity-building and empowerment of individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities through a human-centred developmental approach.
- Knowledge about and respect for the rights of service users.
- Problem-solving and anticipatory socialisation through an understanding of the normative developmental life cycle, and expected life tasks and crises in relation to age related influences, with due consideration to socio-cultural expectations.
- The assumption, identification and recognition of strengths and potential of all human beings.
- An appreciation and respect for diversity in relation to "race", culture, religion, ethnicity, linguistic origin, gender, sexual orientation and differential abilities.

(Sewpaul, 2005: 221)

More specifically, the Global Standards (Sewpaul, 2005: 219) assert that social workers promote the realisation of human rights through interventions based on practice models and techniques that allow them to pursue a series of 'developmental, protective, preventive and/or therapeutic purposes' to:

Facilitate the inclusion of marginalised, socially excluded, dispossessed, vulnerable and at-risk groups of people'; 'Form relationships with and mobilise individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities to enhance their well-being and their problem-solving capacities'; 'Assist and educate people to obtain services and resources in their communities'; Advocate for, and/or with people, changes in those policies and structural conditions that maintain people in marginalised, dispossessed and vulnerable positions...; Work towards the protection of people who are not in a position to do so themselves'; 'Promote respect for traditions, cultures, ideologies, beliefs and religions amongst different ethnic groups and societies, insofar as these do not conflict with the fundamental human rights of people'; or 'Plan, organise, administer and manage programmes and organisations dedicated to any of the purposes.

The IFSW (2012) guide for Social Work practice highlights the importance, for social workers seeking to fulfill the human rights and social justice principles of social work, to be aware of the following perspectives:

- Humanist and sustainable perspective (focusing on the dignity and needs of human beings in present and future generations and to their ecological life conditions);
- Democratic perspective (looking for adequate development conditions– economic, social, cultural-facilitating participation at social and civil level in society);
- Political and economic perspective (promoting the subsidiary principle, equality of opportunities and political / social / cultural rights);
- Educational perspective (to be aware about their scientific knowledge, professional skills, and research competences that as student has reached from his / her academic education or as professional at life-long learning individual process).

Reichert (2003: 228) argues that any theoretical foundation of social work or intervention consistent with the dual focus of social work (which distinguishes it from other helping professions) on assisting individuals (and groups) and bringing about change on broader levels, can be safely situated in the terrain of human rights and considered a human rights instrument for guiding social workers' human rights centred practice. In this vein, Cemlyn (2008: 224-225) highlights the links between human rights and diverse 'emancipatory' (literally 'setting free') approaches to social work 'that seek to challenge inequalities at structural and personal levels, promote greater autonomy and empowerment, and resist policies and practices that disempower and oppress'. These include radical, structural, transformational and anti-oppressive approaches to social work (Cemlyn, 2008), culturally sensitive, empowerment and strengths based social work (Reichert, 2003) dialogical praxis, feminism, participatory democracy and anti-colonialist practice (Ife, 2008) among others. 'A human rights perspective in social work' Cemlyn (2008: 225) claims 'includes many of these elements: structural critique aiming for liberation from diverse oppressions; involvement and leadership by oppressed people; and a reflective and dialogical approach that links personal and collective change'.

### [Inductive \(bottom-up\) approaches to human rights in social work](#)

Ife (2008) argues that inductive approaches to human rights tend to be the most usual in social work practice. These involve a process that, starting from immediate practice concerns and problems normally framed as 'private', articulates these in human rights terms. This, Ife (2008: 157) explains, requires 'the acceptance of a political dimension of the problem and seeing the personal problem in a structural framework'. This approach to human rights, which can be used at individual, group and community levels can provide focus, purpose and empowerment for social action seeking change. Moreover, Ife (2008:158) claims, based on Freire's approach to critical pedagogy, the inductive approach to human rights is ideal for engaging with service users and

students in an easier dialogue for change, grounded in specific situations significant and relevant for them.

Beyond the division between deductive and inductive approaches, Hawkins (2009: 126) proposes a model for teaching human rights in social work education which can be seen as combining both. She claims that this model, which emphasises global citizenship perspectives, is particularly suitable in 'affluent democratic societies', such as the US and Canada. The model focuses on the three main requirements for understanding and practising human rights: "literacy", "empathy" and "responsibility". She offers signposts to helpful resources and approaches to develop each of these areas in social work education (Hawkins, 2009: 123-125). These include United Nations guiding documents on human rights, literature on human rights empathy (and to films and internet materials exploring first person accounts of human rights issues and violations), and social work practice models that can foster 'human rights responsibility'. Hawkins (2009: 124) claims that human rights knowledge does not necessarily lead to action to achieve and enhance rights, arguing that it is 'empathy which bridges [human rights] knowledge and action'.

Promoting awareness of global citizenship towards achieving 'a greater understanding of the world, its people and its cultures' she argues 'can enhance empathy and engender a desire to take action' on other people's behalf (Hawkins, 2009: 125). These ideas have recently been developed further in an article (Hawkins and Knox, 2014) where they expand on the evidence for this idea citing evidence from social cognitive neuroscience on how empathy works and can be fostered through educational activities, and discussing examples from social work education. They place emphasis on international social work collaborative projects as a means of promoting "human rights responsibility" amongst social work students. Furthermore, linking with Hawkins (2009) ideas on the centrality of citizenship, they claim that social work education should have as an ultimate goal the promotion of students' engagement as human rights leaders in social work practice at home and abroad, as part of global networks for global justice and human rights for all (Hawkins and Knox, 2014). These ideas link closely with Ferguson and Lavalette's (2006) call for social workers, from a social justice focused perspective, to contribute to global social movements seeking global justice aims.

In order to advance international social work human rights and social justice agendas, two further teaching practices have been highlighted as offering strong potential by Lalayants et al. (2015). These can be considered deductive and inductive respectively. The first involves promoting a greater awareness of international social work and international social work organisations, - defined by Healy (2008 cited in Lalayants et al. 2015: 95) as comprising 'activities in international

practice, international policy development and advocacy, internationally related domestic practice in advocacy, and professional exchange'. And the second involves promoting communication and exchange of experiences between social work students in different countries. In a recent study Lalayants et al. (2015) report very high levels of interest in learning about international social work and communicating and networking with foreign social work students amongst social work students in the United States, UK, and Georgia. Sims et al. (2014) have also highlighted the positive attitudes of social work students in the UK in relation to the social work global agenda and its aim of encouraging an international movement of social workers ready to advance Human Rights and social justice. Sims et al. (2014: 362) report the outcomes and learning from student group work project by the UK JSWEC's International sub-committee aimed at 'publicising the Global Agenda and engaging academic colleagues and students through the consultation period'. In this project, which involved social work students from six UK institutions, group discussion on global issues proved to offer a 'valuable reflective space' that 'brought social work values strongly into focus' and led to enthusiastic critical debates which prompted new ways of thinking leading to new learning (Sims et al., 2014: 370).

To conclude this section discussing the available literature on human rights, social work and social work education, I can assert that I have found an abundance of publications highlighting the key role of social work education in preparing students for a future social work practice based on human rights as well as publications offering theoretical insights into what human rights based social work practice and education may involve (e.g. Ife, 2008; Ife, 2016; Méndez Fernández et al., 2006). By contrast there is little empirical research on practices in teaching and learning about human rights in social work education. My research study, focusing on the teaching and learning about human rights (and social justice) in social work education, responds to this gap in the English and Spanish literature and has the potential to offer a worthwhile contribution to knowledge in the developing area of human rights and social work.

## Conclusion

In the first part of this literature review I focused on social justice, offering an overview of key concepts, theories, debates, and research evidence relevant to social work education in England and Spain. I noted that contemporary literature highlights a backlash against social justice ideals, as neoliberal ideology becomes the 'common sense' of governments (from varying political traditions) throughout the world (Ferguson, 2008:2-3). The logic of neoliberal ideology, which deems social justice an unrealistic aspiration given market pressures, is claimed to have permeated social work. For 'neoliberal social work' (Jones, 2004) issues of oppression and values of social justice lose importance, the focus descends from international to local contexts, and social problems are addressed from relativistic and narrow professional perspectives.

Nonetheless, it is clear from the literature, that many social workers and social work bodies (including the IASS, IFSW and CCC (see [www.globalsocialagenda.org](http://www.globalsocialagenda.org))), are claiming that SJ is more important than ever for social work and are seeking ways in which the profession can now advance the struggle for SJ in local, national and international contexts of practice in order to address widespread, yet preventable social injustice and suffering. Suggestions include strengthening the focus on the links between private problems, social structures and politics; rejecting individual pathologising solutions to problems with social structural origins; attending to historical and international perspectives; reclaiming and defending the profession's autonomy and values, and building closer relationships between professionals, service users, social work educators and social work students. The literature consistently highlights the role of human rights perspectives (as inclusive of 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation human rights enshrined by the UNDHR) in offering social work a unique discourse for countering the neoliberal ideology that distances it from its SJ foundations.

In part two of the literature review, I focused on human rights, introducing the concept of human rights and exploring the history, strengths and contradictions of the United Nations human rights developments. I offered an overview of the history of human rights in social work and considered current research about teaching human rights in social work education, and the direction and possibilities of human rights approaches in social work in contemporary globalised societies. Historically, the profession has lacked explicit attention to human rights in social work practice, theory and teaching. However, in recent decades, human rights perspectives have been increasingly promoted as having the potential to offer social workers guidance in developing social work for social justice, and a strong discourse with which to challenge unjust policies and social structures. A key obstacle for the ready incorporation of human rights perspectives into

social work relates to the legalistic connotations ascribed to human rights. And it is argued that a current challenge for social work is to go beyond such legalistic approaches and develop its own 'social' understanding of human rights so the profession can contribute, from its areas of expertise and strength, to worldwide human rights struggles (Ife, 2016; Sewpaul, 2016).

This literature review has shown that the foundations of human rights and social justice ideals lie in two different traditions, which have been explored throughout the chapter. However, the critical analysis of available literature in both fields leads me to conclude that social justice work can be seen as human rights work, and the struggles for holistic human rights can be seen as social justice struggles. Each of these traditions has its own particularities and strengths, each of which can be drawn upon for emancipatory social work struggles.

In the following chapter I provide a comparative overview of the background and current contexts of social work education in England and Spain.



# CHAPTER 3: SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN ENGLAND AND SPAIN: THE BACKGROUND

## Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a comparative chronological overview of developments in social work education in England and Spain from the inception of the profession up to the present time. And I explore cultural and ideological influences on the profession in the two countries.

## The origins and value base of social work education in England and Spain

Social work as a distinctive activity aimed at helping the poor, based on a knowledge base and specific methods of intervention, originated in ‘the slums of London in the late XIX century’ (Younghusband, 1981: 11) and quickly expanded to the USA and to other Northern and Central European countries (Méndez-Bonito, 2005: 226; Payne, 2005). Parallel and mutually influential developments in USA and England followed two main approaches facing the task to address social problems related to poverty and lack of education:

- 1) The *psychosocial casework* approach (Richmond, 1917) with a focus on therapeutic relationships with individuals and families in order to help them overcome the “individual malfunction” leading to their problems (Higham, 2006: 21)
- 2) The *settlement house* movement (Addams, 1912) oriented towards community action and education aimed at addressing the societal origin of social problems of the poor.

Younghusband (1981: 11) explained that the pioneers behind these developments in social work in England were

philanthropists [who] belonged to their time, particularly in their unquestioned belief in the Protestant work ethic. But they also had a Christian motivation expressed in belief in the equality of men, though they did not question the class system and they were more clear about obligations than rights.

It can be argued that this description does not account for necessary differences in the ideology of individuals involved and of the organizations promoting social work developments from the pioneer individualist and community based approaches. However, it does highlight an important aspect that may help explain the cultural value base that has marked mainstream British social work in comparison with Spanish social work: its underlying Protestant ethic. Spanish social work is in contrast largely marked by a Catholic ethic.

The origins of social work in Spain need to be linked with a history of Catholic altruism rooted 'in centuries of concrete and local service to the needy' supported by 'a solid network of religious communities capable of providing structure and resources of all kinds for its charitable work' (Méndez-Bonito, 2005: 227). However, the social work profession as a distinctive scientific activity entered Spain as a foreign tradition which started to emerge in the first half of the 20th century (Sanz Cintora, 2001) but did not make a definite appearance until the late 1950s (Méndez-Bonito, 2005: 226) given the country's history.

Méndez-Bonito (2005: 227-228) asserts that the social work profession 'presupposes a world vision born and developed in the Protestant West', based on Protestant individualism and a scientific approach to human problems. Protestant notions around the value of self-autonomy and self-determination, a conception of human beings 'as autonomous subjects less engaged from concrete historical communities', or the understanding of personal success and wellbeing as individual projects are typically Protestant sensibilities reflected in world-wide codes of ethics but relatively "foreign" to the cultural values of societies such as the Spanish (Méndez-Bonito, 2005: 227-228).

Moreover, other Protestant notions such as the view of wealth as an indication of spiritual health or the role of the work position in determining a person's identity and dignity, can help explain some societal values which have been more predominant in the British society (Tropman, 1985) and influenced the historical developments and ideological arguments within the profession (Tropman, 1985). These values are in contrast with typically Catholic societies' value notions such as seeing wellbeing as relational, the acceptance of help from family and religious networks, or an ambivalence towards wealth (Tropman, 1985).

The second feature of the ideology of social work pioneers highlighted by Younghusband (1981: 11), namely the Christian belief in the intrinsic value of each person, however, brings closer the social work principles and values of the profession in both countries. The common belief in the

dignity of all people paved the way of the profession's identification with human rights principles and commitments in England and Spain.

The two countries have become during social work history and up to the present time much more culturally diverse and less religious societies. And the number of 'practicing' Christians (Anglican and Catholics) who attend church weekly has been sharply reduced to a very small minority of the population in England (less than 10%) and Spain (around 12%) (NatCen, 2014 cited in Sherwood, 2016 ; CIS, 2015). However, Christian religions are still the most commonly ascribed in the two countries, and a Christian sensitivity and value base from the legacy of their long histories of Christianity can be said to still prevail. In England and Wales (these data are aggregated in main sociological surveys) in 2014, 19% of the population identified as Anglican, 8.3% as Catholic and 15.5% as other Christians; 7.7% asserted to identify with non-Christian religions (NatCen, 2014 cited in Sherwood, 2016). In Spain in 2015, 69. 3% of the population described themselves as Catholic and only 1.9 % as members of other religions in 2015 (CIS, 2015).

The final consideration in Younghusband's (1981: 11) statement, asserting that English pioneer social workers were not prepared to question the class system or to outweigh service user's rights over their obligations, points to the fact that current concepts of social justice as involving a redistribution of resources, structural changes to address inequality and the provision of rights based social services and benefits, would be developed and integrated within the social work profession in England as response to events of the 20th century. This was also the case of Spanish social work.

## First schools of social work and social work education in the first half of the 20th Century: England and Spain.

The new models of social work intervention introduced in England at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century required some form of training for the settings' volunteers and workers. This training initially took the form of apprenticeships at the settings until the first taught courses started to develop. The beginning of social work education in England is traced back to a programme of lectures at the Women's University Settlement in London, started in 1895 by this settlement, the C.O.S, and the National Union of Women Workers (Younghusband, 1981: 14). In the following years numerous social work courses were founded in British, European and American Universities. Given the courses' fees, these were mainly attended by middle-class young women (Doel, 2012: 19; Payne, 2005). Nevertheless, until the 1960s, the role of social workers, care workers, volunteers, assistants, trainees and other staff working in social work/charity settings in England

were not clearly differentiated, and many of these remained untrained (Doel, 2012: 20; Higham, 2006; Younghusband, 1981).

The first school of social work in Spain was founded in Barcelona in 1932 during the first years of the Spanish II Republic (1931-1939)(Sanz Cintora, 2001; De la Red and Brezmes, 2009), which is considered the first attempt of the Spanish society to establish a democracy. This school, a franchise of a Belgium Catholic school of social work, was aimed at '[providing with knowledge and technical training to those who decided to contribute to the work of improving the society]' (my translation, Estruch and Güel 1976, cited in Sanz Cintora, 2001: 11).

However, the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and resulting establishment of the Francoist dictatorship (1939-1975) separated the path of the evolution of the social work profession in Spain from the developments in Europe and the United States. Under the far right military dictatorship led by Francisco Franco, the country was plunged until the 1960s into a dark period of repression, international isolation and significant steps back to the past in what respects the economy, religion, culture and social action. Public charity and the training of social workers were left in the hands of the Catholic Church and, to a lesser extent, to the regime's single party (Sanz Cintora, 2001). For the first decades of the dictatorship, social workers -whose desired profile was that of "exemplary Catholic ladies"- were assigned paternalistic and assistance- oriented roles in relation to the relief and moral control of the poor (Sanz Cintora, 2001).

The mission statement of the second school of social work in Spain, founded in Madrid at the beginning of the dictatorship, can serve to illustrate the ideological backlash in the field of social work brought about by the newly established political regime. According to this school's mission statement, social work [asistencia social] was 'a feminine area of study which aims [were] either a preparation of women for a service to society or an improvement of their education in order to become good and Christian mothers' (my translation, Estruch and Güel, 1976, cited in Sanz Cintora, 2001: 11) .

In England, the first decades of the 20th century (1900-1945) were characterized by overwhelming social needs -from the consequences of the First World War to mass unemployment in the 1930s' economic depression. However, social work methods were not established enough to be seen as capable of making a contribution by government departments seeking to address these problems through social policy (Payne, 2005: 47). Younghusband (1981: 20) summarised the first decades of the 20th century (1900- 1945) as a 'long standstill' in terms of the development of social work knowledge, methods, education and training. She claimed that

during that time social workers 'did not make the discoveries nor exercise the influence of the early pioneers and they stopped short of recorded and pooled experience [although] they learned a good deal about social need and how to meet it with the resources available and about individual crises and disabilities' (Younghusband, 1981: 20).

## The 1950s and 1960s: boom of social work education in England and Spain

### England

From the mid-1940s, however, social workers' expertise and potential roles in public welfare provision started to be appreciated by the British government. During and after the Second World War the appointment of social workers to evacuate people and to develop welfare provision for the homeless was encouraged by the Ministry of Health, and they became an integral part of the emerging British Welfare state (Younghusband, 1981; Payne, 2005). During the 1950s and 1960s' expansion of the welfare state, social workers acquired key roles in the implementation of public services and were employed in local authorities (primarily in child care services) in large numbers. Titmuss (1950: 289-290) claimed that social workers' contribution 'expressed almost a new concept of the relationship between public agencies and the public served'; social workers started to be seen as 'needed because they knew about people and about distress, because they could help to bring the wide array of statutory and voluntary agencies bear on the several needs of a particular individual ...'.

This way, the government became a key stakeholder of the social work profession, including the training of qualified social workers. Since then and up to the present time, the managerialism of social work education in England 'characterised by a gradual but steady centralizing [governmental] control over educational content and delivery' has been a critical feature that differentiates historical and present expressions of social work in England and Spain, where social work education has been a much more independent academic domain for most of the brief history of the profession in the country (late 1950s- onwards)(Sims, 2003: 62).

The establishment of such a relationship of dependency between the British welfare state and the social work profession involved for the latter a relevant ideological shift with implications up to present time. It is argued that within this relationship, social workers in England became 'post-political' (Halmos, 1978, cited in Weinstein, 2011: 12). As the plan for the welfare state was to eradicate the origin of social problems (the five giants of want, squalor, ignorance, unemployment

and ill-health)(Beveridge, 1942) and give financial security “from cradle to the grave”, any remaining social problems had to be caused by individual pathologies or dysfunctional families (Weinstein, 2011: 2012). Individual pathology, then, was reinforced as to be the focus of social workers’ expertise and interventions. Whilst universal rights and social justice became a banner of the state’s ideology of the time, social work as a profession got increasingly untangled from these causes, focusing instead on individual interventions and the development of its professionalism.

In the 1960s, the reorganization of public social services and the promotion and standardisation of social work training became British and English government’s efforts. In response to concerns on a shortage of social workers, social work training experienced in the 1960s a government sponsored boom (Younghusband, 1981: 33; Doel, 2012: 20). This resulted in the number of social workers qualified at Universities being doubled and in the introduction of social work qualifying courses in Colleges of further education during the 1960s; important efforts were made to spread the courses throughout the country (Younghusband, 1981: 33; Bamford, 2015: 23).

## Spain

The 1960s was also a period of great expansion of social work education in Spain. Following the highly reactionary and repressive post-war period which had lasted approximately two decades (1939-late 1950s), and although still under the dictatorial regime, the country experienced a process of modernisation and external openness of the national economy. This process fuelled from the 1960s a series of changes in the Spanish society such as an expanding industrialization, rural-to-urban and abroad (mainly Europe) migrations, or the development of tourism (Casanova and Gil, 2012). These societal changes and resulting new social needs, together with the influence of diverse social movements and currents of change, had an important impact on social work (Sanz Cintora, 2001).

Sanz Cintora (2001: 15-16) highlights two main direct influences to the profession in Spain in the 1960s. Firstly, he refers to ‘the “breezes” coming from Rome’ and introducing in through the Catholic Church social assistance modernizing ideas, such as the value of planning and technification, and some social critique. Secondly, he points to ‘the “winds” coming from Latin America’ through the radical social work *Reconceptualization* movement which understood social work as a science and radical social agent for the achievement of fairer and more inclusive societies. This movement, which emerged in the 1960s in Latin America, was deeply intertwined with the movements of *Liberation Theology* and *Popular Education (or Critical Pedagogy)*. It is claimed that the disciplines of theology, education and social work formed a “radical triangle”

leading to a radical shift in the way practitioners, religious organisations and educators worked and engaged with impoverished communities (Ferguson et al., 2017, forthcoming). This occurred in a context of broader social rebellion against Western (US in particular) influenced developmentalist policies.

In Latin America, the social work profession had emerged in the 1920s as a positivist discipline aligned with medicine. Under the strong influence of US functionalist and case work based social work, the focus of the first social work developments in the region was on individual pathologies rather than on the social and political structures that generated social problems and widespread poverty in the region (Saracostti et al., 2012). By contrast, the social work Reconceptualization movement drew attention to 'the need to create a Latin American social work capable of responding to the specific problems and needs of the region', drawing from practitioners' shared frustration with the processes and outcomes of developmentalist policies and individualistic interventions in community projects in impoverished areas (Saracostti et al., 2012: 470). At the core of the movement was the concept of "conscientization", which was closely aligned with the Marxist notion of achieving "class consciousness" towards the liberation of those oppressed by capitalist social structures. Reconceptualized social work aimed at empowering communities by promoting social change "from below", through tangible strategies for uncovering oppressive social structures, engaging with participatory research and practice and promoting political mobilisation (Crivas, 1999 cited in Ferguson et al., 2017, forthcoming).

The Latin American radical movements in social work, education and theology spread very quickly amongst Portuguese and Spanish speaking countries, including Spain. However, the movements were short lived as they were sharply interrupted, and their practitioners fiercely persecuted, with the rise of military dictatorships established throughout the region since the late 1960s.

The legacy of the social work Reconceptualization movement has, however, been deep and long lasting in social work in Latin America and the countries where the movement spread. During the 1960s and 1970s Spanish universities received numerous visiting speakers and teachers from abroad, including leaders and well known authors from the Reconceptualization movement, such as Ezequiel Ander Egg (Argentina) who had a deep impact on educators and students' attitudes towards the social work profession (Sanz Cintora, 2001: 16). Moreover, the extraordinarily intense scholarly productivity of the movement had a profound influence on the body of Spanish social work knowledge which is still evident today.

In Spain, the influence of the Reconceptualization movement and other international social work developments converged in the 1960s with national democratic movements and resulted in the spread within social work of a theoretical and activist boom. Subsequently, two key demands were articulated from the profession: a higher level of professional training and status on the one hand, and social rights and public social services for all citizens, on the other (Sanz Cintora, 2001; Matos-Silveira, 2013; Martinez-Roman, 2012). Whilst the first of these demands started to become a reality very quickly, it was not until Franco's death in 1975 and the advent of democracy in Spain that the commitment to social rights also came true.

The Catholic church, together with the military and the regime's party, had a fundamental role in sustaining the ideology of the Francoist dictatorship. Power was distributed amongst these three institutions, all of which had fundamental roles in the terror, political repression and imposition of a rigid and authoritative morality that took place during the dictatorship, especially during the first two decades (Casanova and Gil, 2012). Nonetheless, and especially as time passed during the dictatorship, the relationship between the Catholic church and the state became increasingly complex and often antagonistic, with critical sections and movements within the church leading or becoming fundamental part of social justice and political resistance movements (Martinez-Roman, 2012; Casanova and Gil, 2012; Sanz Cintora, 2001)

Regarding social work, significant modernisation and professionalisation processes have been promoted by more progressive sections of the Catholic church and from within social work schools linked to it from the 1960s (Vazquez, 1970: 40) and up to the present time. Largely promoted by the action of various Catholic movements, during the period comprised between the late 1950s and the early 1970s there was an enormous 'investment of effort, zeal, and resources' in the creation of social work schools, (Méndez-Bonito, 2005: 230). Whereas by the beginning of 1957 there were only five schools of social work in Spain, 27 new schools were created between that year and 1964, when social work [asistencia social] was recognized for the first time as an official technical qualification (Sanz Cintora, 2001: 17). By 1970 there were 42 schools of social work in Spain, most of them belonging to the Church (De la Red and Brezmes, 2009: 139).

Méndez-Bonito (2005: 234) argues that the 1960s was the period of time when the foreign, liberal tradition of social work converged with the Spanish tradition of Catholic altruism, and highlights the 'wisdom' with which the schools of social work 'were able to renew native altruism, grafting and naturalizing a practice that had been born beyond the borders of Spain'. This was however a 'cultural translation', through which social work incorporated to some the extent foreign professional values developed in the 'Protestant West', whilst remaining dependent on the



‘native altruist tradition for nurturance’ and a Catholic sensitivity (Méndez-Bonito, 2005: 234).

The values and traditions of nurturance (including a better acceptance of personal incapacity and failure) and charity in the Spanish culture may help explain the fact that social work has been through its history and remains an attractive profession in Spain, with abundant vocational trainees (majority women) in spite of rather consistent poor labour market conditions.

The work ethic (Weber, 1988/2001), that characterizes a Protestant ethic, is rather different from a Catholic view of work, where work is seen as an instrumental duty but virtue is achieved through commitment to the family wellbeing and vocational charity work (Tropman, 1985). The Spanish tradition of Charity is evident through the history of local charity organisations (yet well connected through church structures) and has also significantly influenced the development of state institutions (Méndez-Bonito, 2005). Wilenski (1981) has reported the key role of political Catholic parties in the development of welfare states in countries with Catholic traditions. Moreover, Méndez-Bonito (2005: 230) highlights the coincidence of socialism and Catholicism in relation to welfare concerns, based on values such as solidarity, universality and wealth sharing. She argues that, given all this, Catholic inspired rhetoric in social work ‘easily and seamlessly derived towards a pro-working class and leftist discourse’ in Spanish social work (Méndez-Bonito, 2005: 230).

The complexities of the relationship between the Catholic church and the social work profession, and the roles of Catholic groups and social work schools in the professionalization of social work are also acknowledged by other authors such as Sanz Cintora (2001) or Martinez-Roman (2012). However, accounts of the history of social work in Spain frequently ignore the influence of “the other church” (Martinez-Roman, 2012: 2) in the development of professional social work, and present the Catholic background of Spanish social work as something that needed overcoming for the establishment of the profession.

Indeed, social work in Spain has a history of achieving status and legitimacy nationally through international support (Méndez-Bonito, 2005), but I find these accounts concerning in relation to the fact that the merit of any advances in the social work profession is attributed solely to foreign influences and international social work institutions, and the particularities of social work professional culture in the country resulting from the “convergence” of liberal and native traditions are undervalued or ignored (e.g. Matos-Silveira, 2013)). Méndez-Bonito (2005) argues that a sensitivity towards these cultural particularities of the profession in Spain regains much importance in relation to ensuring successful outcomes for the profession facing the process of European Convergence of social work education.

# Social work education in Spain from the 1970s to the introduction of the social work Degrees in England and Spain.

## Spain

In Spain, the 1970s was a decade marked by a transition from dictatorship to a democratic political system. Whilst the trigger for the transition was the dictator Franco's death in 1975, and the process of transition was fundamentally led from state institutions, the dictatorial regime had been in crisis and lost a significant amount of power and legitimacy since the mid 60s, when opposition social movements became widespread. The 1970s saw an upswing of democratic protests and social pressure from a large part of Spanish society including the workers' movement, students, intellectuals, professional associations, Catholic sections (notably grass root parish organisations) and emerging social movements such as the feminist, pacifist or ecologist (Casanova and Gil, 2012).

After Franco's death, there was a climate of uncertainty and political instability, including bursts of violence and terrorism from different fronts, but where consensus efforts across the political spectrum and civil society eventually led to the first democratic general elections after the dictatorship in 1977. In this climate, social work in the 1970s, including its curriculum was very much influenced by radical social work currents previously discussed (Bañez , n.d.).

Following the consolidation of social rights in the Spanish Constitution of 1978 (highest national law), social workers assumed central roles in the setting up and development of a nation-wide public system of social services that was supposed to become one of the four "pillars" of the newly established Spanish Welfare State (Domenech, 1990). The other three "pillars" are the national systems of Health, Education and Pensions. Hence, the late 1970s and the 1980s were years of great development and strengthening for social work in Spain.

Social work studies achieved in 1983 university level through the introduction of the 3 year University Degree "Diplomatura en Trabajo Social" as the route towards social work qualification (Charfolet, 2009). Social work schools were attached or integrated into public and private Universities across the country.

In 1990, the Ministry of Education incorporated "Social Work and Social Services" as a scientific discipline or area of knowledge within the Law and Social Sciences. This is considered by Spanish writers on this field a fundamental milestone in the evolution of the profession in Spain (Vázquez

O. *et al*, 2004; Martinez-Roman, 2012; Charfolet, 2009). By 1990, social workers were thus recognised as qualified professionals with key responsibilities in the public systems of social services and with a diversity of roles to play in other sectors of welfare and social action (health care, education, specialised social services, NGOs, etc.), and the profession counted with its own body of theoretical and methodological knowledge for working with individuals, groups and communities (De la Red and Brezmes, 2009: 142).

Nevertheless, and in spite of the important achievements of the 1980s, the profession was still facing by the early 1990s a series of difficulties and contradictions, such as the lack of funding and resources to guarantee universal and non-stigmatizing social services, or the improved but still weak professional status, that kept frustrating many of the aspirations of previous decades. In the face of these limitations, and under the influence of the neoliberal oriented social policies that already prevailed in most of the European countries (amongst which Spain sought its integration), social work took from the 1990s until the present time a new path. This new path is defined by a progressive abandonment of community work (Domenech, 1990), the reduction and bureaucratization of professional roles (Charfolet, 2009), the privatization of public social services and a general marketisation of social services and social action (De la Red and Brezmes, 2009: 143).

In 1998, a commission was created in order to establish a strategy for achieving an upgrade of social work studies from a three year (*Diplomatura*) to a five year (*Licenciatura*) degree. This commission was formed by the Consejo de Trabajo Social (National professional association) and the Conferencia de Directores de Escuelas de Trabajo social [Association of directors of schools of social work], and included professional and academic representatives (Lima, 2007; Vázquez O. *et al*, 2004). This commission prepared a document presenting the 'social, scientific, academic and professional criteria' justifying the request for upgrading the social work degree, which was submitted in 2000 to the relevant University regulatory body (Lima, 2007: 3). In 2001, a public campaign in support of this petition was started by the commission and, as a result the procedures for progressing the petition were initiated in 2002 by the relevant University body (Lima, 2007). However, a final resolution was left pending and eventually cancelled in sight of the process of the European Higher Education Convergence started by the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (C.R.E, 1999) by which signatory countries including the UK and Spain committed to reform national Higher Education systems in order to achieve a European common framework.

As the Bologna reforms started to be introduced in Spain, the work invested in the social work *Licenciatura* degree campaign was reoriented towards the development of a new four year social

work degree under the new European higher education framework (Vázquez O. *et al*, 2004). The new social work degree (*Grado en Trabajo Social*) was eventually introduced in the 2009/2010 academic year in the majority of Universities offering social work courses, being its introduction compulsory deadline the following year (2010/2011). Postgraduate social work courses (MA equivalent and doctoral levels) have also emerged since then, although these do not lead to social work qualification.

The European Convergence of Higher Education reforms have been widely criticised and have encountered resistance amongst academics from European universities, mainly due to their underlying market oriented policy drives (Kivnen and Narmi, 2003, cited in Sims 2003: 61). However, the introduction of the new four year social work degree *Grado en Trabajo Social* was experienced as a successful culmination of previous efforts to raise the standard of social work education and academia in Spain (Lima, 2007). Such overall positive evaluation of the European Higher Education convergence in relation to social work has been widespread amongst European countries that have been able to increase through the process the length and quality of social work studies (Martínez-Roman and Campanini, 2011).

Susan Lawrence, the then president of the European Association of Schools of Social Work, reported in 2012 that the Bologna reform had provided throughout Europe opportunities for rapid academisation of social work education, increased the value of social work research, promoted the internationalisation of schools of social work, and triggered the development of postgraduate social work education. However, she noted, European convergence had also facilitated the marketisation of public universities and an 'ideological shift concerning the purpose of science [including social work] which is seen increasingly as serving the needs of industry and capital through an emphasis on skills acquisition over the potentially transformative power of critical thinking' (Lawrence, 2012: 8). Moreover, Martínez-Roman and Campanini (2011) have noted, there are countries such as Romania or Portugal which have needed to reduce the level and length of social work education and therefore value very negatively the effects of Bologna reforms.

## England

### 1970s

The creation of Social Services Departments according to the 1970 Local Authority Social Services Act and the establishment of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) in 1971 arguably marked the beginning of a continuing trend of Central Government led social work reforms of social work training, which is evident and highly relevant in current developments of social work education in England. The CCETSW assumed responsibility for the regulation of social work training and the promotion of good practice in social work education. At the inception of the Council, there were two routes to qualification in social work: 1) the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) – an academic route taught at Degree and Masters level- and 2) the Certificate in Social Service (CSS) - an employment route. These two routes would eventually merge into a single *Diploma of Social Work* (DipSW) in 1988, after almost two decades of heated debate and controversy amongst academics, employers and government stakeholders around the aims and standards of social work education (Bamford, 2015: 78-79).

Jones (2011: 27) states that the 1970s, a period marked by a social climate of radical struggles such as civil rights movements, feminism or trade unionism, was an ‘extraordinary’ period for British social work. As prosperity gave way to economic recession during the decade, social workers ‘going into the communities’ were overwhelmed by social issues for which they were ‘unprepared’ and ‘deskilled’ ‘in the face of the mounting expectations of the public and other professions’ (Weinstein, 2011: 13). These were social problems the welfare state had failed to fix, including bad housing, unemployment or abuse by the police at more deprived communities. In this context, social workers faced the first child protection inquiries and saw the beginning of the “witch-hunt” of the profession by the press (Weinstein, 2011: 13) which continues today.

From the late 1960s, some teachers of social science subjects in social work courses started to introduce critical contents about class inequalities, the nature of poverty, race and gender oppression, radical psychiatry and psychology, etc., which conflicted with professional elements of the programmes (Jones, 2011: 29). At the same time, a new stream of students engaged with ‘the wider political context of protest and questioning’ entered the courses and began to challenge much of the profession’s mainstream history and ideas, as well as the content of social work courses (Jones, 2011: 29). Jones (2011: 30) has documented his experience as a social work student of the time

I remember all too well how outraged we were as social work students to hear our professional lecturers promulgate views of poverty as though they were manifestations of pathological personalities and inadequate mothering; of the well-functioning family with the mother at the hearth was the ideal and how clients were both devious and childlike. It really was so much stuff and nonsense and a million light years away from what we were discovering about class inequalities and the reproduction of poverty and disadvantage under capitalism

The demand for a more critical social work education posed a significant challenge to social work courses and professional tutors. According to Jones (2011), this challenge overwhelmed many of the programmes (arguably those based on a weakest knowledge base and academic power), was resisted or co-opted by many others (those of more powerful institutions), and was embraced by a minority of academics and courses that would shape the developments of radical social work.

Lavalette (2011: 5), a lead figure in contemporary radical/critical social work, acknowledges that radical social work in the 1970s was a minority and heterogeneous current, with a stronger presence in some regions of Britain such as London or Yorkshire. It was however influential enough to make 'the state respond' to the threat of the 'political influence' under which social workers graduating from some universities came (Jones, 2011: 36-37). The tensions posed by radical currents within the profession reached the CCETSW which played a role in the control of their influence in social work education and training.

The characteristics of key moves to protect social work education from the radical influences are arguably well expressed by Jones (2011: 40) who claims that 'from this period onward, and evident in every change that has been made to professional social work education since [has involved that] the academic and intellectual content of the courses has been constrained and diluted in favour of content that emphasised the priorities of the agencies' in an attempt to produce 'doers and not thinkers'. It is his conclusion that the fact 'that we now have highly state regulated social work education in Britain is not simply a reflection of state power or neoliberalism, but of a complicit senior social work academy which all too often was the implementer of reactionary change' (Jones, 2011: 42). Whereas this is a strong accusation on the part of Jones, which may not be generalisable to all the work of social work academy and professional bodies, I agree with his analysis of the direction of subsequent reforms in social work education.

In relation to the following developments of the 1970s initiated radical social work, this was not immune from the decline in the industrial struggles and the "onslaught" of Thatcherism during the 1980s and onwards. In that context, radical social work diversified and became diluted into political activity and identity politics, which many radical social workers engaged with (Weinstein, 2011). In recent years however, and notably through the Social Work Action Network (SWAN),

radical and critical social work has been reinvigorated in a context where social workers and social work educators in England are facing strikingly similar challenges that those discussed above in relation to the period that saw the emergence of radical social work. These challenges include widespread and ever-growing inequality, government cuts and marketisation efforts in social services and welfare provision, government and media victimization of the poor and vulnerable sectors of society, an aggressive managerialism of the profession from the Government, highly bureaucratic and stressful working conditions, pushes towards the reduction and questioning of the critical social science knowledge base of the profession, or the spiking media attack to the profession.

### *1980's – 2003.*

During the 1980s, the CCETSW, leading on social work education, developed a framework for the Diploma in Social work which 'concentrated validation and standard setting on the agreed objectives for the outcome performance of students' (CCETSW, 1987, cited in Sims, 2003: 62). The framework gave employers important roles in the management of social work programmes in collaboration with Colleges and Universities (Sims, 2003: 62).

Sims (2003) asserts that for the next three decades (1980s, 1990s and 2000s) government controlled standards setting, a focus on competencies outcomes of the social work curriculum and an increasingly close relationship of education and employment (or, rather, education and training 'in the service of economy' (Lyons, 1999, cited in Sims, 2003:63) have motivated and characterized the government led social work education reforms in England. With international influences having had a very limited influence in social work education developments.

From the 1980s until present social work and social work education have been presented as in continuous need of reform under both Conservative and New Labour (1997-2010) governments. The latter embraced neoliberal arguments about social policy and social work under its "third way" ideals (e. g. Ferguson, 2008; Bamford, 2015; Jordan and Drakeford, 2012). Thus, the focus on outcomes, competencies, and market principles in relation to social work education and practice started under the Conservative Party and was extended by the Labour Party (Bamford, 2015: 70).

At its entrance into power, the New Labour led under its public services "modernisation agenda" a review of the whole system of social work education, including the CCETSW, the Diploma in Social Work, curriculum and delivery of programmes and social work training placements (Bamford, 2015: 79). As a result of this review, the CCETSW was abolished and the General Social

Care Council in England (GSCC) (parallel councils in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) was established as the new regulatory framework for social work education. The GSCC operated in England between 2001 and 2012, when social work regulation was taken over by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) in England (parallel sister councils continued to operate after 2012 in other countries of the UK) (Council, 2016: 4).

During the period of GSCC regulation, specifically in 2003, the current *Degree of Social Work* was introduced in England at Honours and Masters degree levels, replacing the DipSW as the social work qualification. The framework for the new degrees was one of divided responsibilities: the recently introduced Training Organisation of Personal Services (TOPSS) defined occupational standards, the GSCC validated the curriculum and approved courses, and colleges and universities delivered them (Bamford, 2015: 80-81).

The introduction of the *Degree in Social Work* coincided in time and will have been to some extent affected by the Bologna Process (C.R.E, 1999). However, whereas the policies of Higher Education European convergence are openly recognised as having meant a milestone and had a major impact on the direction for social work education in many European countries including Spain (Lorenz, 2005), the European influences on the development of new social work degrees were rarely made explicit by the policy makers leading the introduction of the degrees (Sims, 2003). These links tend to be absent in contemporary accounts of the recent history of social work education (e.g. Bamford, 2015).

Kivnen and Narmi's (2003, cited in Sims, 2003: 61) claim that policy drives towards the convergence of higher education in Europe were characterized by the three elements of marketization, managerialism, and performance. Indeed, these three characteristics arguably summarise well the policy drives for reform of social work education in England in recent decades, but any resemblance in the direction of recent reforms in England and social work education in Europe after Bologna can be better explained by the common overarching influence of neoliberal politics rather than by an effect of the European higher education area in social work education in England; especially as the influence of these policy drives had been clear in England a long time before the Bologna process.

Moreover, whilst other European countries such as Spain have been focusing since the Bologna reform on the gradual implementation of the reforms and developing areas such as social work research, social work education at postgraduate level or the internationalisation of teaching (Vázquez O. *et al*, 2004), the latest developments of social work education in England have



involved a shift towards a decreased academisation in favour of greater employer control, and a compartmentalisation and narrowing of social work knowledge base and roles in society. These developments have resulted in the introduction in England of more professional standards and new fast track employment based routes towards social work qualifications, as I discuss in next section.

## Developments after the introduction of the social work degrees in England and Spain

### Developments after the introduction of the Social work degree in Spain

Since the relatively recent introduction of the new framework of social work education in Spain (2010/2011), there has been a great focus in social work education on the development and evaluation of the newly established social work Degree [*Grado en Trabajo Social*] and on improving quality standards of social work education. Improving practice education in social work through the development and implementation of quality standards in this area is currently an important area of focus (CDTS, 2013).

However, parallel to these developments within social work education, the profession as a whole has needed to respond in recent years to the challenges brought by the socio-economic crisis and austerity policies in Spain. Ioakimidis et al. (2014) have documented how the consequences of the crisis and austerity in Spain have dramatically impacted social work directly and indirectly through, for example, the deterioration of working conditions of social workers, draconian cuts in welfare services, or through increased social needs and suffering amongst the Spanish population.

It can be argued that social work educators in Spain, despite having welcomed the Bologna reforms and benefitted from its upsides, have shown so far a generalised critical awareness of the neoliberal drives of these reforms and openly and collectively resisted marketization and managerialism of the profession from different professional associations. De la Red and Brezmes (2009: 145) argue that at academic and professional institutional organisation levels, there had been in the profession already from the 1990s a critical reflection on the impact of neoliberal tendencies in social work, particularly focusing on the increasing bureaucratisation of social work practice and the reduction of the scope of professional perspectives, aims and methods. And there had been an active search for alternative ways forward and reference frameworks from

which to understand and face the challenges arising from new contexts of professional practice, such as challenges posed by neoliberal globalization. Key ideas had revolved around the importance of collective social work perspectives, and around the development of techniques for the defense of citizen rights (De la Fuente and Sotomayor, 2009: 128).

Hence, when the economic crisis and austerity started to hit the most vulnerable populations of Spain and the social work profession itself, social work institutions (most notably and visibly the Consejo General de Trabajo Social (national professional association)) were ready to produce strong and consistent defence responses. The manifesto “Social Work Facing the Crisis” (CGTS, 2009) produced in the social work “XI National Congress” in 2009, for example, reflects a firm critique and opposition to unbridled neoliberalism and cuts in social welfare. It positions the profession as an ally of the most vulnerable people in their struggles for social justice, claiming that social change in this direction is possible and necessary; seeking this type of social change is a legitimate aim of the profession. Also, and encouraged by the international agendas of social work, the Spanish social work professional associations have been prompt and effective in creating national and regional professional “alliances” in the defence of public social services together with other stakeholders, organisations and “social” professions (such as social pedagogy) (Lima, 2012).

These institutional responses from the profession have converged in recent years with grass root reactions of Spanish social workers to the challenges posed by the crisis, drawing to an important extent from the spirit of the social mobilizations that have been taking place in Spain since the protests of May 2011, and the “Copernican” cultural change these brought about into the Spanish society (Castells, 2012). The grassroots *Marea Naranja* [Orange tide] social movement in the defence of public social services in particular, has unified under one “brand” rather diverse groups of stakeholders of public social services, serving as a platform for social workers (including social work educators) throughout the country to engage with activism to reclaim social justice and social change.

## Developments after the introduction of the Social work degree in England

### The social work reform board

In 2009, following baby Peter Connelly's death and the scandal brought about by the child protection failure that had taken place in his case, a new process of review of social work practice and education was established (Higgins, 2015: 5). The *Social Work Task Force* was created and given the task to 'bring coherence to education and training and the future pattern of careers in social work' (Bamford, 2015: 84). The task force produced a series of recommendations for a reformed system of qualifying social work education (Social Work Task Force, 2009). A *Social Work Reform Board* was then established by the government in order to secure during the next three years the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations.

Changes brought about by the reform included the foundation of a professional body: *The College of Social Work*, a new professional standards framework, and the introduction of a new supported and assessed first year of social work practice (Higgins, 2015: 5). The new framework for professional social work standards: the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (The College of Social Work, 2012) is structured around nine domains of capability which include 'values and ethics' 'diversity' and 'rights, justice and economic well-being', alongside domains such as 'professionalism' 'knowledge' or 'interventions and skills'. Competence is defined for each domain at the different career stages.

Higgins (2015: 11) argues that the PCF can be seen as 'an attempt to re-establish the professional knowledge base and ethical integrity of the profession'. The PCF emphasises social work knowledge and values including social justice, that were largely absent in the previous occupational standards of social work education which had applied to the original curriculum of the social work degree. The PCF, according to Higgins (2015), re-aligns social work education in England with broader conceptions of the profession comparable with the IFSW's definition of social work and the conceptions of the profession in other European countries.

However, soon after the establishment of the PCF, the HCPC introduced another set of standards for social workers in England: the 'Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers in England' (Health & Care Professions Council, 2012b). Although the new HCPC standards were mapped against the PCF (Health & Care Professions Council, 2012a), the confusion created by the existence of the two different documents of social work standards has been strongly criticised by stakeholders throughout the profession. This problem has also been highlighted by the two most recent

reviews of social work education, by Croisdale-Appleby (2014) and Narey (2014) respectively. Key outcomes of these two reports are explored in more depth in the final section of this chapter.

### Introduction of fast-track social work training programmes

Despite the apparently comprehensive and broadly welcome changes brought about by the Social Work Reform Board since 2010, including the introduction and consolidation of the PCF, social work education in England has been in recent years far from settled.

In a socio-political climate marked by the complex cascade effects of the global financial crisis that started in the US in 2008, and with constraint on public spending or austerity characterising mainstream politics throughout Europe and notably the UK (Ferguson and Lavalette, 2013), market accountability and cost saving arguments have been paramount in recent developments in social work education in England. In this spirit, a series of new fast-track social work training programmes have been introduced in recent years.

The 14-month programme *Step up to social work* was the first to be introduced. The programme started in 2010 and it is based on an apprenticeship training model whereby qualifying social workers with a previous 2:1 degree (or a 2:2 degree plus higher level qualification) are employed by Children's Services and combine academic learning with learning at the workplace. This was followed by the introduction in 2014 of the two year *Frontline* programme. Frontline is an intensive work based training programme which academic side is reduced to summer schools, weekend events, and some distance learning. The Frontline programme leads to a post-graduate diploma in social work in the first year and a Masters degree in the second year. Frontline aims to recruit highest achieving graduates, unapologetically targeting graduates from the Russell Group universities, as the following quote from its website illustrates:

With 25 graduates applying for every place, Frontline has emerged as one of the most competitive graduate schemes in the UK. By demonstrating that social work is a highly-skilled leadership profession that transforms lives, Frontline is beginning to change perceptions of social work among the best and brightest graduates. Of the near 3,000 students who completed a social work masters in 2011/12, only 270 were from Russell Group universities. By contrast, 1,272 Russell Group graduates applied to join Frontline's first cohort. Furthermore, just 10 Oxbridge graduates started social work in 2011/12, whilst 184 have applied to Frontline.

(Frontline organisation, 2014)

These two programmes, launched by the Department for Education, have been received amongst very much controversy in social work in England, especially Frontline. Main criticisms relate to the lowering of training standards and de-academisation of social work knowledge resulting from

reduced periods of academic learning, and from the narrow and compartmentalised knowledge and skills obtained by social workers qualified in this way.

From these programmes and their advocates, it is argued that the strict selection criteria and targeting of 'outstanding graduates' (MacAlister, 2014) will help ensure that social workers qualified through these routes will excel in their future social work practice. This is an argument which further evaluation research on the long term outcomes of these programmes will need to prove. But in any case, this approach to recruitment, arguably raises questions about the reproduction of power and class structures in social work education and the social work workforce.

Whilst it is claimed, for example that 'Frontline has also demonstrated its ability to attract a diverse cohort' with 1 in 4 Frontline trainees being male, 16% from ethnic minority backgrounds and 15% having 'indicated that they had received Free School Meals' (Frontline organisation, 2014), I find this claim rather patchy and contradictory with the elitist rhetoric used in the public information on the programmes and the narrow, social justice blind/ignorant, approaches to social work and social work education these represent.

The Chief Social Worker for Adults, Lynn Romeo has insisted in a recent presentation (Romeo and Croisdale-Appleby, 2016) that fast track routes to social work qualification will remain minority and complementary routes towards qualification and are not meant to substitute social work training through University undergraduate and postgraduate academic degrees. The fast track model is however continuing to expand with the imminent introduction by the Department of Health of the *Think Ahead* programme for qualification in mental health social work.

Something that appears clear to me about these new employment based training models, and in relation to the present and the future of social work education in England, is that these seem to lie on an 'ever narrowing an increasingly managerialist territory' of social work (Bamford, 2015: 88). Bamford (2015: 88) argues, amongst many other authors, that 'managerial control over social work (in the UK, but especially in England) has grown to the point where social workers are unable to exercise self-direction over their working lives' 'with individuality and creativity squeezed out by the demands of employers'. Facing the pressures of managerialism, there is an ever growing number of social workers claiming that they 'didn't come into social work for this!' (Ferguson, 2010) and sharing their stories about why they have left or wish to leave the profession in the light of the realisation that their work demands do not allow for meaningful

relationships with service users, ethical practice, and social justice aims that motivated them to enter the profession (Higgins, 2015)

I believe the extent and the tensions generated by the widespread of such narrow approaches to social work in England are well captured and synthesised by Higgins (2015: 4) who recently claimed that there is currently 'a struggle for the soul of social work in England'. By this he refers to a heated debate between two versions of the purpose and nature of social work. On one side of the debate, he argues, there is a "broad conception of social work" which has at its hearth a relationship centred practice, ethical thinking human rights and social justice aims. This conception of social work is for Higgins in line with the vision of the profession of the IFSW and the other European states. This perspective gives importance to the profession's knowledge base and its links with democratic rights. Higgins (2015: 8) argues that the PCF framework 'may be viewed as an attempt to re-establish the professional knowledge base and ethical integrity of the profession', and therefore opens doors for these broader notions within social work.

On the other side of the debate, Higgins (2015: 8) argues, there is a "narrow conception of social work" where the focus on relationships, social work knowledge and human rights and social justice values is replaced with 'bureaucratic processes and fixed and limited tasks', 'risk assessment, legal interventions and management type activities'. He refers to this as a 'statutory paradigm of social work' (Higgins, 2015: 10), arguing that in spite of the College of Social Work (now closed) having emphasised that the statutory social work model should not be considered the central model in social work, this seems to be indeed the dominant paradigm in social work in England. Community and group work are left out of the social work terrain by current policy and this "paradigm" within social work (Higgins, 2015: 10; Bamford, 2015: 86). Most interestingly, Higgins (2015) claims, and I very much agree, Narey (2014) and Croisdale-Appleby's (2014) reports on social work education reflect these two "souls" of contemporary social work in England. The narrower "soul" or conception is for Higgins represented by Narey's views and recommendations whereas the broader "soul" is represented by Croisdale-Appleby's.

### [Narey and Croisdale-Appleby's reviews of social work education in England, and the two "souls" of social work.](#)

Narey's (2014) report *Making the Education of Social workers Consistently Effective* focusing on the education of children social workers, was commissioned by the Department for Education. As a core standpoint, Narey (2014: 13) states that the IFSW's definition of social work is 'thoroughly inadequate' for child protection social work and there is a need for another definition 'that concentrates on that work, generally carried out in the statutory sector, which is about protecting

children'. Narey (2014: 7) argues that there should be clearer guidance 'about the skills and professional knowledge required of graduate social workers' and claims that developing such guidance should be a priority; he recommends that the chief social worker should be assigned the tasks of producing a relevant definition of social work and of developing these new training guidance criteria. Social work curricula at Universities, he suggests, should be based on these criteria, rather than on ideological and theoretical concepts. The report expresses concern about social work training focusing too much on non-oppressive practice and partnership with service users, through controversial statements such as this:

I am not suggesting that the role of disadvantage and inequality in exacerbating poor parenting and child neglect or abuse should not be discussed at university. But it is vital that social work education for those working with children is not dominated by theories of non-oppressive practice, empowerment and partnership (Narey, 2014: 12).

Narey's (2014) report also argues for higher academic requirements and stricter recruitment procedures to be introduced and audited at Universities, and for further specialisation in social work training. He recommends the expansion and broader funding for fast track programs.

In contrast, Croisdale-Appleby's (2014) review, commissioned by the Department of Health, finds the IFSW's definition and international social work contexts relevant for contemporary social work in England. And it argues for social work to invest efforts in developing its social science knowledge base, as well as for social work 'rigorous research' to be promoted and 'underpin social work teaching and beliefs' (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014: 16). Throughout the review report, Croisdale-Appleby (2014: 85) considers the social worker 'as a practitioner, as a professional, and as social scientist'. The report highlights concerns about the reduction of courses' length in fast track training programs and highlights the importance of generic social work training so qualified social workers can successfully work 'in any context and with any service user group' after a properly supported induction (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014: 30).

Croisdale-Appleby (2014) acknowledges that the PCF framework 'has achieved widespread acceptance among all stakeholder categories and has a sense of "being owned" by the profession' suggesting that its content and values need to be protected and accounted for in any future processes of integration of professional standards. An integration of standards is recommended by both Narey (2014) and himself and one of the few areas of agreement amongst these two reviews.

Except for some minor disagreements with aspects such as content covered, or in relation to some of the recommendations of the Croisdale- Appleby's report (APSW and JUCSWEC, 2014), this has been extremely welcomed by the social work professional bodies in England. The report

has been highly praised for its academic rigour and for the high level of engagement with stakeholders (BASW, 2014b).

The exact opposite has been the case of Narey's (2014) review. Narey's review has been punctually welcomed by high profile figures in child protection such as Lord Laming and top executives in public and private Children's services (Department for Education, 2014). But it has been heavily criticised and received with concern in the profession, in relation to disagreement with the report's arguments and recommendations, but very significantly, also in relation to its questionable academic rigour and evidence base.

Bamford (2015:88), for example, has argued in relation to Narey's approach to the profession that 'Narey's concern with child protection and his over optimistic assumptions about the benefits of removing children from troubled situations have led him to ignore the context in which many children have to grow up', whereas in child protection work social workers need to be able to deal with numerous other social problems such as domestic violence, or mental health issues without regard of the specialisation. Also in relation to Narey's view of the profession, the BASW (2014a) responded to Narey's review in an online press release that 'social work is a single, internationally recognised profession and the social work role cannot be split into a distinct checklist of skills needed for adults and children's social work'.

Concerns about the academic 'rigour' of Narey's review have been highlighted by individual academics (e.g. Cleary, 2014) as well as in various statements by professional organisations. The JUCSWEC (Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee) and APSW (Association of Professors of Social Work) (2014) have expressed the following as part of a joint statement

We welcome the thoughtful and informed analysis offered by Croisdale- Appleby and see it as attempting to build helpfully on existing reforms. We value his rigorous approach to the evidence and the analysis, and we express concern that the Narey report draws primarily on anecdotal evidence. We are uneasy that in the case of this report, change may result from assumptions rather than evidence about the current developments in social work education

The criticism in relation to the rigour of Narey's (2014) review and the anecdotal rather than evidence base for his recommendations have been strongly refuted by Narey, who has allegedly described these as 'patent nonsense' as his report is 'littered with evidence and the only people who have been saying that are a handful of academics who are resistant to change', having concluded that 'changes to social work education are going to happen and how is still up for debate' (Narey, 2014 quoted in Schraer, 2014).



With a recent development in relation to the social work profession affecting social work education being the unexpected closure of the College of social work (Council, 2016: 14) due to the Government's decision to stop funding it in June 2015, this raises serious concerns about the future of the PCF and the advances towards the broad conception of social work and social work education in England, aligned with human rights and social justice values, that these have been claimed to represent.

## Conclusion

This chapter has offered a comparative chronological overview of developments in social work education in England and Spain, including an exploration of cultural and ideological influences on the profession in the two countries. In England, the history of social work education has been marked by increasing control by the government in the context of state welfare provision since the 1950s. By contrast, in Spain, political dictatorship from 1939-1975 meant that social workers' role within a Welfare state did not start until the 1980s, and never gained much force, having been rapidly faced by the growing pressures of neoliberalism, in a European political context of welfare contraction.

Spanish social work education history is instead largely intertwined with different currents and movements within the Spanish Catholic Church (ranging from the deeply conservative and oppressive to the progressive). Whereas social work education in both countries has reached University Degree level (in the 1980s in Spain and only in 2003 in England), social work education in Spain, since the advent of democracy, has always been governed by an independent academic community in charge of the processes of reform of social workers' training and education, and the scientific enhancement of the profession, without significant external ideological constraints. Social work education in England however, has been subject to continuous government reforms and to close monitoring of training contents, standards and ideological influences, for much of its history since the second half of the 20th century.

I have argued that whereas social work education in Spain seems fully engaged with human rights and social justice perspectives in social work, as promoted by the IFSW, social work education in England appears more inward looking so that these perspectives are in constant tension with pervasive narrow models of social work promoted by central government. Moreover, whereas social work education in Spain is highly engaged at present with developing social work's scientific knowledge base and expanding postgraduate education, there are current attempts from the government in England towards a de-academisation of social work training through the

undermining of the social science base of the curriculum and the promotion of alternative employment based routes towards social work qualification.

In the following chapter I discuss the overall research design.

# CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY I: RESEARCH DESIGN

## Introduction

This is the first of two methodology chapters. In this chapter I explain the overall research design. I discuss the critical paradigm of research, critical realist methodology, research quality criteria applicable to this research, and research ethics. I discuss how the methodology of this research has been developed in order to suit the research aims, objectives and questions.

The following illustration offers a simplified visual overview of the research methodology:

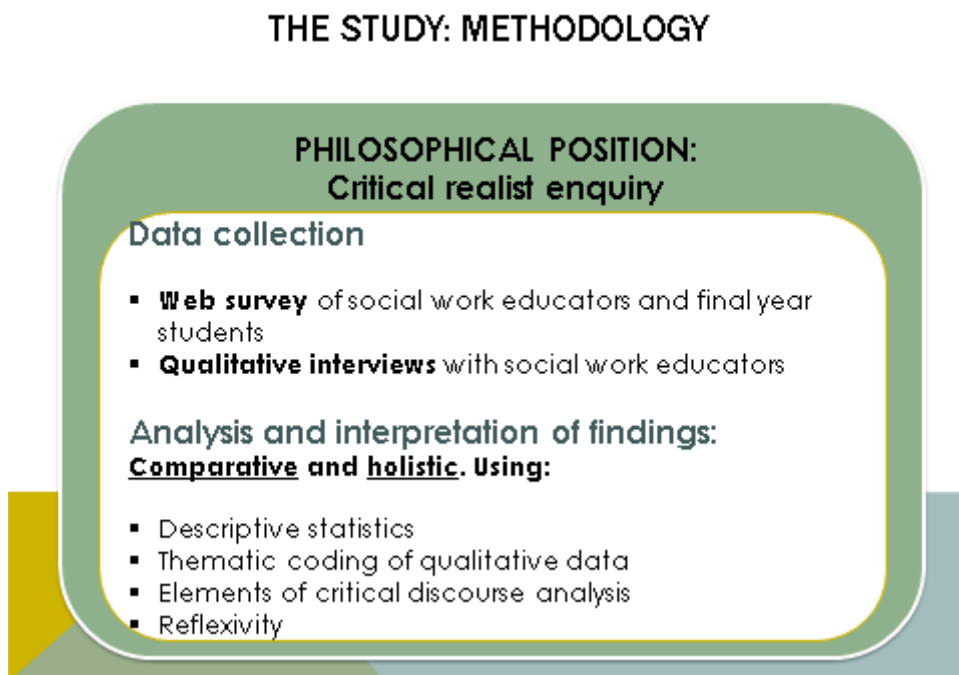


FIGURE 1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## Epistemology: critical realism as a framework for interpreting the world and bringing about social change

In this research project, which seeks to contribute to the critical international debates around the place of human rights and social justice in social work education, I engage with critical approaches to social work research. The term 'critical' in social science refers to those social inquiries that explicitly seek human beings' emancipation from domination and oppression and the incorporation of moral and philosophical bases to social science rather than the separation of these from the research as demanded by the natural sciences (Bohman, 2005: 29; Douglas, 2006).

Framing this research project within a critical paradigm of social research arguably gains a strong justification from social work ethics and values. These include the profession's commitment to challenge the social structures and processes that generate power imbalances and maintain people's oppression (Pease, 2010: 98). The centrality of ethics in every aspect of the social work profession is reflected in the fact that national and international social work organisations across the world have developed complex codes of ethics to guide ethical professional conduct, research and education since the profession's inception (Soydan, 2010: 133). Thus, social work can be seen as much as a moral as a technical activity, concerned with studying social phenomena in order to transform the world and pursue emancipatory projects. For doing this, social workers depend on quality knowledge and skills, and they also need to take account of tacit knowledge and ethical reasoning (Pease, 2010: 102) in order to interpret and manage the complex and open social realities they seek to intervene.

D'Cruz and Jones (2014: 10-12) argue that engaging with the critical paradigm in the social sciences should involve embracing a commitment of social research to address the ethical and political dimensions of knowledge making, as well as reflexively locating ourselves within these power dynamics. Indeed, I agree this commitment to reflexivity (or critical self-reflection) strengthens a contemporary 'critical' paradigm in social work and therefore have strived to incorporate reflexivity throughout my research. However, it needs to be noted that reflexivity has been a largely absent characteristic of traditional critical theory in the Social Sciences and in the early and most influential work of Roy Bhaskar (1989; 1975) (considered the founder of Critical Realism) and Norman Fairclough (2014 [1989]) (lead author in Critical Discourse Analysis research). Both Bhaskar and Fairclough's ideas have informed this research. The reasons for an objection to fully incorporate reflexivity in realist research can be traced back to (in my view)

rather complicated philosophical arguments in the realist tradition of social theory, although authors from this tradition are increasingly coming round those positions and recognizing that both philosophically and pragmatically ‘there is ample reason [in social sciences] for attending to reflexivity today’ (Archer, 2010). Whilst I chose to incorporate reflexivity for ethical and pragmatic reasons into this critical realist inspired research, I find the literature justifying this combination reassuring of the quality of the philosophical grounds of this research.

Pease (2010) claims that a commitment to reflexivity has methodological implications as well, as it requires to establish strong links between paradigm and research methods, and to carefully explain the choices related to research methodology. Critical social research can be seen as involving a commitment to both ethically and methodologically sound and trustworthy research; I have sought to uphold this throughout my work on this PhD.

## The critical paradigm in the social sciences and social work research

Sociology, as established at the end of the 19th century, was originally situated within a positivist philosophy of social science, which assumed this new discipline could adopt the method of natural science in order to discover societal scientific laws. Positivist authors claimed that values and facts as well as observation and theory should be kept separated by social scientists. These assumptions, however, were challenged by several schools of thought along the 20th century. Critical theorists were part of the earliest instigators of this reaction against positivism in social sciences (Douglas, 2006).

The term ‘critical’ in social sciences has traditionally been applied to the work originated in The Frankfurt School in the 1920s of the 20th century. Although adhered to scientific Marxism from its foundation (Crotty, 1998: 114-115; Friedeburg, 2011; How, 2003: X), the critical theory of the Frankfurt school is claimed to be also rooted in the Ancient Greeks, Humanistic philosophy and Judaist and Christian traditions, and deeply influenced by the philosophies of continental thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Weber, or Freud (Sherratt, 2006) .

Nevertheless, from its first formulations in the first half of the 20th century, critical theory has expanded widely among the disciplines of social sciences and interacted with numerous intellectual traditions, resulting in different understandings of critical social science, some of which can significantly diverge from the generic lines of Marxist class analysis (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005) .

Kincheloe and McLaren (2005: 304) have concluded that a definition of critical researchers would position these as researchers who use their work as a cultural or social critique and share a series of assumptions which include: that human thought is mediated by socially and historically constituted power relations; facts cannot be separated from values and ideology; capitalism affects the relationship between concepts and objects; language is key to the subjectivity construction; groups in societies are privileged at the expense of others' oppression; oppression manifests itself in many and interrelated forms (such as on the grounds of class, race and gender, sexuality, ability, culture, colonialism or religion).

Thus, critical research's main characteristics can be seen as linking more strongly with the researchers' commitment to the empowerment of the oppressed and the construction of a better world than with fixed rigid methodological and theoretical assumptions. A critical social science, and especially a critical social work, committed to social justice and human rights, which recognises the complexity of social problems and aims to uncover and resist their root causes, becomes, for me, essential for doing complex and holistic research in a world where local and national issues are deeply intertwined with global phenomena.

## Adopting critical realism for this research project

In this research, I have engaged with critical realism as a philosophical framework, as I find it highly coherent with social work's moral commitments and plural and complex knowledge. Critical realist notions and reasoning have allowed me to develop an understanding of this project's subject matter (human rights and social justice in social work education) in accordance with my personal worldview, necessarily shaped by diverse life experiences. These include my experience as a practitioner social worker and former social work student. Moreover, I found in critical realism sound epistemological and ontological grounds for the combination of multiple methods (web surveys and qualitative interviews) in this research project, and for guiding my data collection and analysis towards fruitful responses to the research questions outlined. There are, however, some commonly acknowledged difficulties in the incorporation of a critical realist philosophy in social sciences research that can help explain the very limited number of empirical critical realist studies in social work. These include the overcomplicated language used in many texts and the underdevelopment of a critical realist methodology. As I explain later in this section, I had to address these challenges in my research.

I next offer a brief overview of some key ideas and methodological implications of adopting a critical realist philosophical approach in social sciences' research. Whilst doing this, I highlight the

strengths and limitations for the application of critical realism to social work research and to this particular research project. I conclude the section by outlining the broad steps I followed in conducting my critical realist data analysis and interpretation.

## Critical Realism

Oliver (2012: 374) states that the foundation of critical realism as a philosophical approach to social sciences is attributed to the work of Roy Bhaskar in the 1970s. A fundamental notion of critical realism is that it assumes the existence of an external social reality, independent of subjects' perception, which social scientist aim to discover by acquiring an increasing knowledge of it (Oliver, 2012: 374). Discovering and understanding such reality allows for changes in the status quo and for pursuing emancipatory goals (Bhaskar, 1989: 2). Robson and McCartan (2016: 33) highlight that some of the distinctive characteristics of critical realism amongst other 'brands' of realism include its 'affinity to emancipatory styles of research' (a characteristic these authors welcome) and 'its emphasis on theory and critical analysis rather than on empirical research' (a characteristic these authors value less but which I do welcome in this research).

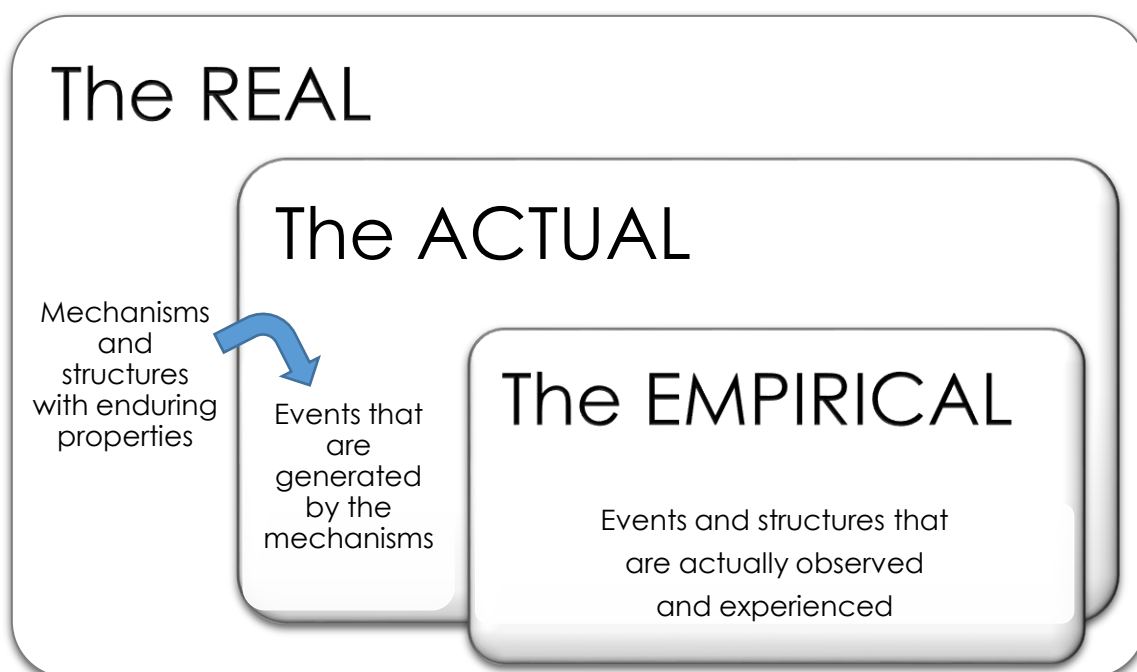
Unlike positivism, critical realism rejects the idea that the scientific knowledge gained from the study of the social reality directly reflects this reality (Bryman, 2012: 29). The social reality, inaccessible to direct observation, is 'a complex, multi-layered and multi causal web of interacting forces' (Oliver, 2012: 374) where social phenomena are the result of a series of 'generative mechanisms' (Bhaskar, 1989) in interaction with each other in particular contexts.

Bhaskar's (1975) conception of the social reality as being stratified in the three domains of "the real", "the actual" and "the empirical" is a key foundation of the critical realist ontology at the same time as perhaps one of its most complicated ideas. In sum, these domains consist of: 1) the lasting mechanisms and social structures – (deepest) real domain-, 2) the events such mechanisms trigger or generate – actual domain-, and 3) the events that are actually experienced or observed – (most superficial) empirical domain-. See illustrative figure below.

Craig and Bigby (2015: 313) offer the following example in order to illustrate Bhaskar's 'tri-layering conceptualization of reality':

We understand the real and actual domains by inferring from their experienced effects. For example, if we observed a series of incidents where single mothers were repeatedly denied access to the private housing market (empirical level), we may deduce that a level of prejudice (real level) was operating against them. "Prejudice" is not seen but inferred, and remains tentative, because another unobserved factor such as the presence of household pets may have led to the denial of housing (actual level).

For a visual illustration of Bhaskar's three reality domains, I have simplified the text of a figure by Mingers (2004: 94) and added a 3D shape effect to emphasise the difference in each of the three layers' depth.



**FIGURE 2 BHASKAR'S THREE REALITY DOMAINS, ADAPTED FROM MINGERS (2004:94)**

The mechanisms and structures of the real domain and many events of the actual domain are unobservable to social scientists but can be inferred from their experienced effects (Craig and Bigby, 2015: 313). However, in the social reality, the relationships between (often unobservable) generative mechanisms, which can include language and individuals' interpretations of the particular situations (Nightingale and Cromby, 2002: 706) are looping and extremely complex. This renders impossible any attempts to explain and predict social phenomena by means of linear causality. Therefore, human scientific knowledge of the social reality, necessarily mediated by the inescapable 'filters of language, meaning-making and social contexts', represent for critical realists provisional and incomplete accounts of the reality (Oliver, 2012: 374). It is accepted that the gap between subjects' perspectivist knowledge of the reality and the reality itself will always remain (Oliver, 2012: 374).



Nevertheless, it is precisely the complex causation and nonlinearity of the reality which opens doors for multiple interventions towards a desired social change (Robson and McCartan, 2016: 31; Oliver, 2012: 375). Hence, in critical realism competing accounts of the social reality and possible ways to intervene in it should be tested against real world experiences and observations in order to find the best possible ways to achieve social justice, starting by uncovering the mechanisms (including false beliefs and discourses) that sustain exploitation and injustice (Bhaskar, 1986, cited in Oliver, 2012: 376). These accounts are constructed through a form of logic reasoning known as retroductive reasoning, which involves making inferences about the underlying causal mechanisms that may be responsible of regularities observed in the social reality (Bryman, 2012: 715).

The process of retroduction combines successive cycles of deduction (from theory to observations) and induction (from observations to theory) towards an increasingly firm establishment of causal mechanisms of the social phenomena of interest (Robson and McCartan, 2016: 37). It involves asking, about the observed phenomena, the question ‘what must be true for this to be the case?’ (Oliver, 2012: 379), or ‘how can we explain the pattern of events that we find?’ (Robson and McCartan, 2016: 32). Robson and McCartan (2016: 371) clarify that in realist research, “theory” ‘refers to mechanisms postulated as being capable of producing the events observed’. The postulation of mechanisms is highly ‘speculative in the first cycles of retroduction, becoming firmer as the research progresses’ (Robson and McCartan, 2016: 371). Whereas the retroductive technique has been proposed as a methodology in itself, observation of phenomena can be conducted through different methods from other approaches to research (Oliver, 2012: 379). There is a wide variety of research methods that can be used by critical researchers to pursue emancipatory purposes whilst upholding ethically committed processes (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005; Humphries, 2008; Potts and Brown, 2005).

It has been highlighted how the critical realist approach to social research particularly suits research projects in practice-based (within open systems) and value-based professions such as social work (Anastas, 1998, 1999, cited in Robson and McCartan, 2016: 32). However, the influence of critical realism has been until the moment very limited in the research in the social sciences in general (Bygstad and Munkvold, 2011: 2); and in social work in particular (Oliver, 2012: 371; Craig and Bigby, 2015). Some of the explanations put forward for this relate to critiques to the overcomplicated, inaccessible, and apparently distanced from practice language of many of its texts (Pratt, 1995, cited in Oliver, 2012; Craig and Bigby, 2015), the limited development of the methodological implications of a critical realist perspective in comparison with other traditional philosophical approaches such as positivism or constructivism (Bygstad and Munkvold, 2011;

Lipscomb, 2008; Yeung, 1997; Craig and Bigby, 2015), and a lack of examples of critical realism being used in social work research (Craig and Bigby, 2015).

During the process of designing and conducting this research project I did encounter these difficulties. Finding relevant literature on critical realism and achieving a good understanding of its main philosophical stances and of its methodological implications for this project was not easy. But I found this to be a positive challenge with the potential of my work arguably resulting in a contribution to the development of knowledge on the use of critical realism in social work research. In order to overcome the lack of literature about critical realism in social work research, I used literature from other disciplines (such as human geography (Yeung, 1997), or information systems (Mingers, 2004)). As for the challenge to grasp key ideas of the critical realist approach, I invested time in understanding this approach's ideas, origins, development and methodological implications by studying (sometimes I felt rather complicated) texts and subsequently elaborating simplified accounts and explanations of several aspects of critical realism such as those I present in this chapter.

More specifically, I integrated critical realism into this research's methodology by following in the processes of data analysis and interpretation a simplified version of Danermark et al. (2002: 109-111) proposed model of six steps for critical realist research. Danermark et al. (2002: 109) claim that their model steps can be used 'as a way from the concrete (stage1) to the abstract (stages2-5) and then back to the concrete' (stage 6).

The steps proposed by Danermark et al. (2002: 109-110) are:

Stage 1: description – of the event or situation we intend to study

Stage 2: analytical resolution – or separation of their components, aspects or dimensions

Stage 3: abduction/ theoretical redescription- interpretation and redescription of the components from hypothetical conceptual frameworks and theories about structures and relations.

Stage 4: retroduction – based on the previous stage, search for answers for research questions

Stage 5: comparison between different theories and abstractions

Stage 6: concretization and contextualization

Danermark et al. (2002: 109) highlight that the model allows for flexibility and should not be used as a fixed template. They acknowledge that these stages can be 'intertwined' and there may be reasons for focusing on some of the proposed stages (Danermark et al., 2002: 109).

The adapted working model I used in my successive cycles of analysis and interpretation of findings was the following:

Stage 1: Description

Stage 2: Analytical resolution

Stage 3: Theoretical redescription (abduction) and retroduction

Stage 4: Concretisation and contextualisation

### **Stage 1: Description**

Having completed the data collection from web surveys and qualitative interviews, I first proceeded to synthesize and describe these. My description of the survey and interview data is presented in chapter six of this thesis, titled “presenting the web survey and interview data”. I coded thematically the qualitative data from web surveys and qualitative interviews, and presented summaries of these assisted by text tables. I used basic descriptive statistics charts to assist with the description of quantitative data from the web surveys.

### **Stage 2: Analytical resolution**

At this stage, I carried out a more in depth analysis of the qualitative data of the interviews by means of using elements of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010) which allowed me to identify underlying discourses and social structures reflected or referred to in the interview texts.

From this point on I used and reported web survey and interview data together in chapter seven, titled “Interpreting the research data”. A combined exploration of the (now synthesized) survey and interview data allowed me to identify a series of emerging patterns, in relation to:

1. The understandings of the role of human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain;
2. Ideology and political agendas affecting social work education in England and Spain; and
3. Teaching, learning and performing of human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain.

I then identified a series of broad areas of generative mechanisms with potential explanatory power about similar and differential patterns in England and Spain in relation to the above areas of research.

1. The ideology of social work international ethics frameworks.
2. Neoliberal ideology.
3. Culture: a) Social work academic culture b) societal cultural differences England and Spain.
4. Various anti-capitalist ideologies
5. Socioeconomic contexts
6. National legal frameworks
7. Social work professional status
8. Social work social work educators and students' individual and/or internal factors.

Danermark et al. (2002: 110) indicate that it is not possible to study all the different aspects of an object of study, and therefore researchers need to choose on which components to focus. At this stage I decided to focus on the three first of these areas of potential generative mechanisms, as I tentatively thought these would offer greater explanatory power. However, the remaining mechanisms were open to consideration in the next stages of data interpretation.

### **Stage 3: Theoretical redescription (abduction) and retroduction**

Theoretical redescription involves interpreting the identified components or aspects of the object of study from 'hypothetical conceptual frameworks and theories about structures and relations' (Danermark et al., 2002: 110). Retroduction, as explained above, involves seeking for explanations for the pattern of events. Danermark et al (2002:110) note that very often established theory and concepts offer readily available explanations, being theoretical redescription and retroduction closely related. Thus, in my interpretation of findings I used readily available theory and, when I could not identify a suitable theoretical explanation, I put forward speculative but transparently reasoned tentative explanations.

### **Stage 4: Concretisation and contextualization**

'Concretization and contextualisation' is listed in Danermark et al. (2002) as the final stage of their model for critical realist data analysis and interpretation. This involves 'examining how different structures and mechanisms manifest themselves in concrete situations', studying how these interact with one another 'under specific conditions'. Given the comparative nature of this research study, both contextualization and concretization are at the core of all stages of the research process.

## International comparative research

This research can be considered, as a whole, an international comparative research project. It responds to, and takes advantage of, the growing influence of international social work professional associations and the enhanced opportunities globalised societies offer social workers for transferring experiences between different parts of the world in order to solve local problems and/or improve local professional practice (Rode, 2009: 29).

Comparative thinking has been central to the holistic, critical realist, analysis and interpretation of findings in this research. Comparative research is rooted in case studies, but it extends the potential of these by addressing case studies findings' lack of generalisability and stability through comparative analysis involving two or more cases (Rode, 2009: 32). Comparative analysis aims to discover the properties of the cases by studying the differences and similarities between them at the different levels social phenomena take place (Denters and Mossberger, 2006). In this research I have sought, through a multilevel approach to comparison, to compare the situations existing in Spain and England regarding the role of human rights and social justice in social work education outlined by International Social Work discourses and guidelines (IASSW and IFSW, 2004; IFSW and IASSW, 2014b; Sewpaul, 2005).

Regarding research questions, Rode (2009: 35-36) indicates the benefits comparative methodology offers to research projects facing different types of research questions. He highlights how: The comparative method helps descriptive research escape from ethnocentrism and guide observation and description, what mainly applies to RQ1 and RQ3:

1. *What are the understandings of the role of HR and SJ in social work education in England and Spain?*
3. *What mechanisms and teaching practices are used to transmit HR and SJ to social work students in England and Spain? And what are social work educators and social work students' experiences of these?*

Comparison can work as a form of variable control when facing explanatory questions, what mainly applies to RQ2:

2. *What are some of the main characteristics of social work education's contexts and institutions in England and Spain – including underlying ideologies and political agendas? How do these impact the teaching and learning about HR and SJ in social work?*

Comparison supports, in relation to pragmatic questions, learning from the experience of others (after a proper evaluation of context and transferability), what mainly applies to RQ4:

4. *What could help social work educators operationalize the commitment to the values of HR and SJ embodied in the Global Standards for social work education? What lessons can be learned from educational practices in these different cultural contexts*

## Sampling strategy: multilevel sampling

### Sampling the international level of social work education

A first sampling decision involved in the research project from early phases of its design was to select England and Spain as national cases for the comparative study of the implementation of International Social Work commitment to the values of human rights and social justice in what regards social work education.

My selection of these two national cases among the world-wide population or universe of social work national educational systems, is explained firstly for my familiarity and relationship with both English and Spanish educational systems and wider cultures and responds therefore to convenience criteria.

Spain is my country of origin and nationality. There, I have lived most of my life, received my formal (and informal) education, trained as a social worker and had a work experience as a social work practitioner. England is my country of residence, where I currently work as a social work lecturer and I have been coursing social work postgraduate studies during the last six years. Although my cultural competence and language skills will be biased towards my better understanding of the Spanish culture, society and language, I can say I also count with (increasingly improving) skills and levels of cultural competence that allow me to do research in the context of the United Kingdom. I see myself therefore in a privileged position for doing comparative research between these two countries, which on turn share characteristics that make them suitable for a fruitful comparative research. These characteristics included at the point of designing this research (in 2011) the recent (and ongoing) reforms of both countries' social work educational systems, their common educational framework of the European Higher Education Area, and their shared belonging to the wider political and socio economic context of the European Union.

## Trustworthiness (quality) in this research

Pease (2010: 111) asserts that, for social work research to be able 'to promote social change and social justice ... [according to the moral imperatives of our profession] social workers must think seriously about the epistemological and political assumptions embedded in their research practices':

We need to be clear about our own beliefs regarding the phenomena we are investigating and our relationships to it ... [and] think of the implications of our theories of knowledge and our structural and discursive locations on the ethics and politics of how we do research (Pease, 2010:111).

For this, D'Cruz and Jones (2014: 65) observe, you need to know the criteria for trustworthy research under the research paradigm you are positioning yourself in, and check that you are conducting both ethically and methodologically sound research.

This research project is embedded in a critical realist epistemology and relies on a multiple methods strategy to data collection. I have used research instruments traditionally aligned with the positivist (web surveys) as well as constructivist (qualitative interviews) research paradigms. At a broader level, however, I acknowledge the interpretative nature of the knowledge (on human rights and social justice in social work education) this research aims to contribute to. Whilst the research was informed by quantitative research quality criteria (internal and external validity, objectivity, etc.) and I sought to consider and apply these where appropriate in relation to the design and use of web surveys, the scope and complexity of the research topic makes impossible the quantitative 'operationalisation' and control of external and internal variables affecting research contexts and processes.

Hence, criteria for research trustworthiness from qualitative methodologies and philosophy become for me the paramount criteria to guide the overall research quality. The quality criteria for qualitative research is however a contested area (Bryman, 2016: 387). A specific framework of quality criteria under which this research can arguably be assessed as of good quality is Yardley's (2000) proposed criteria of 1) sensitivity to context, 2) Commitment, rigour, transparency and coherence, and 3) Impact and importance.

### 1. Sensitivity to context:

Yardley (2000) asserts this comprises the context of theory, socio-cultural settings of the study and the contexts of the relationships between researcher and participants. She highlights that in

those studies from methodologies (such as critical analysis) which seek to query assumptions that 'shape naive observations' it is

desirable to have a fairly extensive grounding in the philosophy of the approach adopted, and the intellectual history of the categories and distinctions that have been applied to the topic ... [which] provides the researcher with the scholastic tools to develop a more profound and far-reaching analysis.

(Yardley, 2000: 220).

Another crucial area of sensitivity to context involves 'an awareness of the socio-cultural setting of the study', including 'normative, ideological, historical, linguistic and socioeconomic influences on the beliefs, objectives, expectations and talk of all participants' (Yardley, 2000: 221). The context of the relationships between the researcher and participants may also be important (Yardley, 2000: 221).

In terms of this research's philosophical base, I have thoroughly sought to establish a strong critical realist philosophical base for the research, studying and aiming to explain in depth the implications of adopting a critical realist philosophy and methodology (see previous sections in this chapter).

In relation to the theory context of the research, I have explored in breadth and depth through the literature review the concepts of human rights and social justice, considering 'their intellectual history' (Yardley, 2000: 220) and different perspectives about their relationship with the social work profession throughout the profession's (international) history and up to the present time. I believe that historical awareness is a key strength of this research. A complementary and similarly fundamental activity has been studying and outlining (in chapter three) some key characteristics and events of the historical and present socio-cultural contexts of social work education in England and Spain.

The work I have done to establish the philosophical, theoretical and socio-cultural contexts of the research has been fundamental in equipping me with a deep and nuanced understanding of these two evolving and context dependent concepts so I could sensitively analyse and interpret the research's context bound data. International comparative thinking and maintaining a focus on history throughout the research has arguably prepared me to engage with thinking processes about present and localized data patterns, enhanced by considerations of the potential relevance of social structures and mechanisms which have impacted the research topic in another places and/or the past.



Notwithstanding the need of careful evaluations of transferability (Rode, 2009: 35-36), I believe that my historical and contextual awareness has enhanced my abductive and retroductive thinking processes which are fundamental parts of critical realist research and which depend very much on the ideas generation capacity and creative thinking of the researcher. Abduction relates to a 'reasoning process where creativity and imagination are used to formulate ideas about how things are connected' (Craig and Bigby, 2015: 315) and retroduction involves the, again speculative, identification of potential causal mechanisms of the events observed (Danermark et al., 2002).

The research site context in the case of the web surveys corresponds with the national contexts of social work education in England and Spain, which chapter three explores in detail. In relation to the small number of qualitative interviews, I discuss in the interview section of this chapter the access process and some characteristic of the relationship between me as a researcher and the interviewees. I provide some contextual information about the characteristics of the two institutions where the interviews took place which made them 'critical' (Bryman, 2016: 409) places for the study. However, in the case of interviews, the extent of contextualization needed to be balanced with confidentiality and an aspiration towards anonymity (full anonymity probably is not possible). Therefore, details about these institutions which may have made these identifiable -such as geographical location, or number of social work students-, as well as some of the interview data have not been disclosed in order to enhance confidentiality and anonymity of institutions and interviewees.

Linking with 'the social context' of the relationship between researcher and participants, Yardley (2000: 221) highlights that 'to ensure sensitivity to the differing perspectives of all those involved, and the wider community to whom the study is relevant' researchers often establish procedures for seeking feedback on their interpretation from relevant stakeholders (participants, other experts, members of the studied community). This is often referred to as respondent validation (Bryman, 2016: 385) and may involve for the researchers asking participants whether 'their realities have been represented appropriately' (Guba and Lincoln, 1982: 246) or if the analysis is 'believable within their understandings and experiences of reality' (D'Cruz and Jones, 2014: 74). Respondent validation is broadly acknowledged as a practice which enhances qualitative research trustworthiness whilst also posing significant potential challenges such as managing a potential reluctance of the participants to be critical to the researcher, or their defensive reactions towards some of the research findings (Bryman, 2016: 385; D'Cruz and Jones, 2014: 74-76; Robson, 2011: 158; Yardley, 2000: 221).

During my PhD studies, I have presented my increasingly firm ideas and findings in relation to the topic in two social work international conferences and a social work conference in the UK - attended in large proportions by social work academics-, and I have discussed these with supervisors and colleagues who are social work lecturers in England as well. I have also commented findings with social workers (former social work students) in Spain. The feedback from these groups has always been positive and corroborated that outcomes of my analysis fit well with their experiences as social work lecturers or former students. Hence, I have a broad sense of validation of my research. However, I have not received feedback from all the participant groups, and the feedback I have received has been informal and given by people with whom I have good relationships (such as colleagues and social worker friends) or who may share close ideas to mine (people who have attended my presentations or with whom I have networked with in conferences which themes were aligned with human rights and social justice values in social work).

Therefore, I cannot claim that seeking respondent validation has been part of the strategy design of this research. Instead, it is my plan to seek this as part of the research dissemination strategy where, in addition to working towards academic publications, I will distribute audiovisual presentations and research reports amongst research participants and stakeholders and invite them to contact me with any feedback. I will also study possibilities for giving life presentations and collect feedback on my findings through workshops or teaching sessions for students at Universities that have participated in the research. The feedback from the dissemination of the research findings will be a key foundation for my future research on topics related to this PhD.

## 2. Commitment, rigour, transparency and coherence

*Commitment*, according to Yardley (2000: 221) relates to the researcher's engagement with the topic (this can include previous research and personal experiences), the development of competent skills in the methods used and immersion in the data.

Limited by my lack of previous experience of social science empirical research (as a trainee PhD researcher) but enhanced by my research methods MA training, my passion and curiosity about this research topic and my efforts to develop my research skills and conduct good quality research, I believe I have engaged profoundly with this research.

*Rigour*, for Yardley (2000:221), refers to the 'completeness' of the data collection and analysis. This depends on the appropriateness of the sample- in terms of whether this supplies enough information for a comprehensive analysis-, and on the completeness of the interpretation- which

should address the complexity and variations observed and may require analysis at several levels. Yardley (2000:222) argues that in some types of qualitative research rigour and commitment 'might be demonstrated by the effective use of prolonged contemplative and emphatic exploration of the topic together with sophisticated theorising, in order to transcend superficial "commonsense" understandings'. In these instances, 'intuition and imagination of the analyst can be much more important than any formalized analytic procedures'. In other cases, "triangulation" in the data collection and analysis (from different sources or through different methods) may be key to develop 'a rounded, multilayered understanding of the research topic'. Or it may be appropriate to combine these two approaches (Yardley, 2000: 222).

I have stated before how I have aimed to build with this research a holistic, tentative picture of the place of human rights and social justice values in social work education in England and Spain, with consideration to both macro and micro levels of the social reality and their interactions in each of the two countries. For this, I have considered and combined 1) the views of social work educators and students throughout the two countries, 2) an exploration of social structures and historical, socio-political and cultural contexts impacting social work in each country and 3) my experiences as an insider and outsider in the two educational systems, addressing my positioning throughout the research. The (I believe) "complete" picture presented in the findings chapters only became clearer as the research progressed. Continuous learning and (often implicit) thinking about possible theoretical links and causal relations between data and ideas from different pieces of data and materials assisted and complemented the more formal successive cycles of critical realist analysis that finally led to what I have intended to be a "rounded, multilayered" account of findings of the research.

*Transparency and coherence*, according to Yardley (2000:222), gain importance at the level of presentation. Coherence links with the clarity and 'persuasiveness' of 'description and argumentation', as well with the fit between the research questions, the philosophical framework adopted and the chosen research methods. Transparency is achieved through detailed accounts about the research process, and through the disclosure of any relevant aspects affecting this (from researchers' motivations to the consideration of external constraints of the research).

Whilst the coherence and clarity of the thesis may be for external readers (and examiners) to evaluate, I have strived to present the research clearly and transparently by explaining methodological choices (giving consideration to strengths and limitations of epistemology and method choices), giving an account of the decisions taken in the research stages, and offering as transparent as possible report of data collection processes. I have engaged with critical thinking

throughout the research process, aiming to critically assess the strengths, potential and limitations of my work and others'. Incorporating reflexivity and 'making myself visible in the text' I have sought to allow myself and others to better understand my standpoints in relation to the research topic and how these may have impacted the research. Reflexivity opens doors for others to identify some 'blind spots' of the research of which I may have been unaware due to my positionality in relation to the research topic and process (Sprague, 2005 cited in Pease, 2010: 108).

### 3. Impact and importance

This is, according to Yardley (2000) the 'decisive' quality criterion. The ideas proposed by the researcher need to be useful and have some 'influence on the beliefs or actions' of others in the field and the broader society. However, Yardley (2000) argues, 'there are many varieties of usefulness' and the contributions of a given piece of research can only be evaluated in the light of the research objectives and 'the community for whom the findings were deemed relevant'.

As highlighted in the introduction and literature review chapters, human rights and social justice social work values are at the core of contemporary debates and literature developments in social work internationally, in England and Spain. Broad human rights perspectives (which include social justice aims) are claimed to offer the profession direction facing contemporary challenges brought about by neoliberal globalisation and bridge 'local and national issues with global concerns' (IFSW-Europe, 2012: 38). But theorisation in these areas is in a developing stage and the specific multilevel implications of a human rights and social justice based social work education have not been explored, to my knowledge, in England and Spain.

Another indicator of the research potential impact is that this has been funded by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council), a UK research council which claims to be committed to support 'high-quality, relevant social science' research that 'makes a difference' for organisations and 'the wider society' (ESRC, 2016). The research proposal submitted to the ESRC included sections focusing on impact and dissemination plans (discussed above).

A related area not directly covered by Yardley (2000) but which I think is important to attend to in assessing the potential impact and trustworthiness of this research relates to the possibilities for *transferability* (or generalisability) of the research findings beyond the research contexts and sites. Robson (2011: 160) asserts that whilst achieving 'external generalisability' beyond the contexts and setting of the research is not normally an aim of qualitative research, 'some kind of [external] generalizability' may be desirable and can be often achieved. This may be through the

development of theory that allows for an understanding of other cases or situations (theoretical generalization). In order to facilitate transferability of findings, 'the contextual conditions' must be an integral part of any knowledge claims (D'Cruz and Jones, 2014: 74). Offering a 'thick description' entailing detailed accounts of a culture, provides others with a data foundation allowing for judgments of the potential for transferability of findings to other socio-cultural contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 316). In realist research, Robson and McCartan (2016: 160) claim, studies can offer 'convincing evidence for a set of mechanisms and the contexts in which they operate' that allow generalization from the sites studies to 'many other' sites. Both my attention to contextualization and realist analysis will arguably help to allow for some transferability of findings beyond this research specific contexts and sites.

## Frameworks for research ethics

There are three main institutions which norms and guidelines regarding research ethics have been taken into account for the design and implementation of this research project.

### Durham University

The research project has been subjected to ethical approval by the University's School of Applied Social Sciences Ethics Committee. Applications for approval by this committee are reviewed in accordance with relevant ethical codes, including the ESRC Ethical framework, and data protection law.

As a PhD student at Durham University, I have received training and guidance on research ethics and risk assessment from my supervisors and the broader doctoral research training programme. The process of gaining ethical approval by the SASS Research Ethics Committee provided me with an opportunity to reflect on how I would ensure with my research conduct: Informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, a safe handling of data and an ethical dissemination of findings. Explanations of such decisions and reports on how these were implemented once doing the fieldwork can be found in this chapter's section on the data collection process.

The process of ethical approval also allowed me to assess the vulnerability of research participants and to anticipate and minimize risks or discomfort to participants and the researcher. My overall ethics and risk assessment pointed to a lack of significant ethical challenges, as this research does not involve particularly vulnerable groups or highly sensitive topics. However, I

could identify and address the low to medium risks to cause discomfort to research participants (social work educators and students) the following table shows<sup>3</sup>:

**TABLE 2 RESEARCH RISK ASSESSMENT**

Risk/Discomfort	Probability (high/medium/low)	Seriousness (high/medium/low)	Precautions
<b>1.</b> <u>Social work educators' survey:</u> Discomfort about giving feedback on how human rights of staff, students and service users are respected at Higher Education Institutions (potential issues of institutional/ political oppression).	Low-medium	Low	-Informed consent on voluntary participation, free withdrawal at any point and non-obligation to respond to particular questions.  -Informing on the contents of the survey. -Thorough survey design, bearing in mind factors that may help to ease anxiety about these topics (order of questions, presentation, etc.).  -Gain support/ from prestigious social work organisations that may increase respondents' trust in the research project. JUC/SWEC, CGCTS
<b>2.</b> Discomfort about the publication of critical findings	Low-medium	Low-Medium	-Informed consent about the likeliness of some critical points to be raised.  -Explaining (information sheets) that raising critical points as well as examples of good practice will help identify key factors for the improvement of social work education in terms of supporting student learning about human rights and social justice.

<sup>3</sup> Note that I completed this table (which is part of the SASS generic ethics form) as a voluntary reflective exercise to assist my ethical thinking but did not submit the corresponding section (section B) of the form as this was not required from me given the low risk of my research project.

## The ESRC

This research project was granted funding by the ESRC (via the corresponding Doctoral Training Centre) as a result of a selection process which included a competitive evaluation of candidates' research proposals according to the ESRC's criteria for methodologically and ethically sound social research, and of candidate's suitability for engaging with their proposed research projects.

The ESRC Research Ethics Framework has been used as the main guide for the research ethical standards expected from me as a researcher for accountability reasons -being this the founding body of the research, but also because I found it to offer rather helpful and practical guidance for the design and implementation of the project in relation to the criteria for methodologically and ethically sound social research (ESRC, 2011).

## The social work profession and its codes of ethics

Many choices involving ethical thinking regarding the underlying theory, methods and other practicalities of the research have been guided by the social work profession's differential principles and values stated in relevant international and national codes of ethics for social work (IASSW and IFSW, 2004; BASW, 2012; CGTS, 2012).

**\*Note on the research framework for the fieldwork carried out in Spain:** Whilst I have not been required to comply with any particular Spanish institutional frameworks for research ethics, Universities and individual research participants in Spain have been made aware of the ethical frameworks and main principles guiding the research process and given the opportunity to ask for further information, and to discuss and negotiate ethical arrangements according their institutional policies or personal values. They have also been offered the possibility to raise complaints about the research conduct to Durham University.

## Research methods for data collection and analysis

As stated in the introduction, this research is based on the following research methods:

- 1) a web survey of social work students and educators sent to all the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) offering social work qualifying courses in the two counties, through which I collected descriptive statistical data and a large number of qualitative brief responses to various open questions.
- 2) a small number of qualitative interviews with social work educators from one University in each country.

### Amendments to the original research design

The original research design included a web survey of social work students and educators in England and Spain, intended to generate primarily quantitative data, followed by case studies of two HEIs offering social work qualifying courses in the two counties. However, during the research process, there were two fundamental changes to the design and use of research methods.

These changes were the result of: 1) unexpected challenges encountered in accessing institutions to act as case studies; 2) my developing awareness of the limitations in my research capacity as a PhD student working within a time and budget limited framework, and 3) my developing realisation, as part of my learning from conducting this research, of the need to simplify the scope of the research and reduce the amount of data to be collected and handled in order to produce a focussed piece of research.

I explain the processes leading to these amendments in the following sections. And while I acknowledge that these changes posed limitations to the richness of the data and the research findings I also argue that these changes were justified and did not prevent the collection of sufficient data to address the research questions, thus retaining the integrity of the research.

Firstly, the planned case studies were replaced by a small number of qualitative interviews with social work educators from one institution in each country, the result of challenges in identifying HEIs in England willing to authorise the involvement of social work staff, and challenges in arranging interviews with individual educators in both countries.



Secondly, analysis of the web surveys shifted from the originally anticipated quantitative approach to a predominantly qualitative approach, since the open ended survey questions generated more, and richer, data than anticipated and required interpretative analysis and discussion.

Reducing the weight of quantitative data arguably limited the level of generalisability of the research findings (D'Cruz and Jones, 2014). And had the case studies, as originally conceived, been carried out they would have yielded data from observing key teaching sessions, focus groups with students and a documentary analysis of teaching materials. This would have supported a wider set of perspectives from educators, students, and my own insights in direct observation of teaching and learning activities.

Verschuren (2003: 137) has articulated the suitability of case studies for researching 'phenomena that are highly complex and/or embedded in their cultural context', and these case studies would have been very valuable in informing an understanding of the differential 'contextual conditions' of social work teaching within the institutions in England and Spain (Yin, 2014: 13). Case studies would have also allowed for 'rich descriptions' and 'insightful explanations' of teaching activities, methods and dynamics in each institution (Yin, 2011: 5). The comparison of findings from each case study would have enhanced my comparative explanation-building in this research (Yin, 2014; Brandell and Varkas, 2001; Silverman, 2013).

### The “story” of my use of research methods: from a mixed methods design to a flexible qualitative design.

As discussed above, at the point of the research design I chose to carry out a web survey of social work students and educators that would be sent to all the HEIs offering social work qualifying courses in the two counties, followed by case studies of two of these HEI in each country. At that point I was thinking of my research as being based on a mixed methods strategy to data collection. This meant combining quantitative and qualitative research strategies in a single project in a 'mutually illuminating' way (Bryman, 2012: 628-629) and using research methods and techniques traditionally aligned with quantitative –surveys- as well as qualitative research paradigms –case study-. The validity and reliability of a pure mixed methods research projects depend on the rigor and quality in the use of each research strategy (Bryman, 2012), being quantitative and qualitative research strategies and methods linked to differential criteria for assessing the quality of the research and the reliability of findings.

When designing my research, I aimed to strive for as good as possible technical rigor in relation to the design, data collection and analysis of web surveys; In relation to the case studies, on the other hand, I aimed to enhance validity and reliability from a qualitative perspective by adhering to the quality criteria discussed previously and this chapter and which include the researchers' engagement with the topic, reflexivity and situated knowledge (D'Cruz and Jones, 2014; Fontana and Frey, 2000; Yardley, 2000).

### A primarily qualitative web survey

However, by the time I started to design the final versions of the web surveys in my second year of studies, the interpretative and exploratory nature of the knowledge (on human rights and social justice) this research aimed to contribute to had become apparent to me. Through my learning from the literature on the research topic, I had realised the great scope, complexity and partly discursive nature of the topic, and the ambiguity and knowledge gaps in relation to key concepts and themes related to human rights and social justice (including the very definitions of these).

Therefore, I no longer believed it was suitable to aim for developing a "proper" quantitative survey, based on the operationalization for measurement of key concepts and the control of external and internal variables affecting research contexts and processes. Nonetheless, I did believe that web surveys were the best tool to collect data and views from social work students and educators across the two countries. The breadth of the findings and the possibility to identify nation-wide patterns were key for me to be able to address the research aims and research questions. Furthermore, I believed that some specific data related to the topic I was seeking to collect could be appropriately collected through close survey questions, such as relevant demographic information, some of the attitudes facing ideas around human rights and social justice in social work and social work education, or some aspects of students' experience of learning about social work ethics in their social work course. These were areas that could be explored through descriptive statistics.

However, apart from the above uses, I was keen to use web surveys in a less typical way, namely in order to collect a large number of qualitative brief responses to various open questions and use these responses as fundamental, rather than complementary, data from the surveys. This meant that I wanted to use web surveys as an exploratory tool with the potential to raise new themes and directions to follow during the research along qualitative lines, rather than as a tool used to measure previously identified and operationalized concepts in order to test hypothesis.

Therefore, whilst I learnt about traditional –quantitative- survey quality criteria and aimed to apply this as far as possible in any aspects of the survey this was applicable (from sampling to close questions design and statistical descriptive analysis), I soon acknowledged that the criteria for research quality from interpretative methodologies (such as reflexivity and transparency) became paramount to guide my pursuing of research quality, being applicable to both the survey and case study research. This was in combination with the critical realist research quality criteria linked to rationality (House, 1991) and maximised explanatory power of theorisation about underlying mechanisms and social structures (Bygstad and Munkvold, 2011), including those shaping subjective interpretations found in this research.

Not having come across any piece of research using web surveys with a focus on the open questions during my literature review or even during my studies of a MA in social research methods, I felt doubtful about engaging with this approach to survey data collection. However, through my reading on mixed methods research I found grounds to believe that as long as this served my research purposes and I was clear of the quality criteria I needed to ascribe to, there were no reasons for not being able to use web surveys in this way. I identified that my fears were linked to two kinds of (interrelated) philosophical arguments against mixed methods research pointed out by Bryman (2012: 629): ‘the embedded method argument’ based on the idea ‘that research methods carry with them fixed epistemological and ontological implications’, and ‘the paradigm argument’ which refers to the assumption that quantitative and qualitative research are comprehensive and incompatible paradigms, with their respective and non-interchangeable epistemologies, values and methods.

Nevertheless, Bryman (2012: 630) claims, whilst different paradigms may be incommensurable, the affirmation that quantitative and qualitative research belong to different scientific paradigms is highly contested. Furthermore, the inescapable interdependence between particular research methods and their epistemological background has not been proven (Bryman, 2012: 630). Quite the opposite, Robson (2011: 162) asserts, there are many completed mixed methods research projects whose success refutes such assumptions. Overcoming my doubts, I saw in my approach to this research project, including this use of the web survey, the potential to become one of these projects.

Thus, whilst engaging with this flexible approach to mixing quantitative and qualitative research perspectives involved some doubts and challenges, I believe that one of the original contributions to knowledge of this research is to offer evidence that quantitative and qualitative research philosophies and methods do not need to be strictly separated and classified, in line with mixed

methods arguments. However, my arguments are more in favour of enhancing the value of flexible approaches to social research methodology in realist research, than of promoting a purist and distinctive third paradigm of “mixed-methods” research, necessarily involving a balanced expertise and attention to quality criteria from quantitative and qualitative research (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

As Howe (1988) highlighted in the past, despite their important differences, there are also similarities and overlapping areas between quantitative and qualitative research that are often overlooked. Whilst mainly engaging with qualitative research, I feel this research has often moved across such overlapping areas. These are areas that, in my view offer a great potential to yield complex and holistic research findings which suit perfectly critical realist research aims.

### From case studies to qualitative interviews

My original idea of conducting case studies of two HEIs in each country in order to explore their approach to human rights and social justice in social work courses was also amended during the course of the research, being this task finally reduced to a small number of qualitative interviews. Four of these were conducted in a Spanish University and three of them in an English University. The recruitment of institutions willing to participate in this research as case studies involved a series of difficulties in England, which I explain in next chapter. This resulted in a delay of the beginning of this phase of the data collection which nonetheless allowed me to progress with the analysis of web surveys and of literature based data.

Once I had gained access to one University in each country and conducted a series interviews with social work teaching staff, I realised that through these interviews and my previous work with the surveys and the literature I had already obtained sufficient data to address the research questions. I also saw that it was unrealistic to aim to conduct four case studies within the remaining time of my PhD studies and that if possible at all carrying out the full case study data collection would result in an overload of data, many of which would not be possible to fit within a focused single piece of research. Having come to this realization I did not feel this was a practical way for me to continue the research; nor was it ethical to waste participants’ time and contributions to the generation of research data which might not be used in the research they were invited to take part. Therefore, the seven qualitative interviews I had conducted together with the web surveys and literature based research eventually formed my data collection methods.

## Conclusion

In this first methodology chapter I have outlined the overall research design, including an introduction to the critical paradigm of social research, critical realist methodology, research quality criteria applicable to this research, and research ethics. I have explained the rationale for adopting a critical realist approach, offering a sound methodological base from which to explore the research questions.

In the next chapter I will discuss the two empirical research methods used in the research, namely web surveys and qualitative interviews.

# CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY II: RESEARCH METHODS

## Introduction

In this second methodology chapter I focus on the empirical research methods and explain the rationale and practicalities in adopting 1) web surveys and 2) qualitative interviews. For each method I offer an overview of advantages while acknowledging limitations and challenges. I also discuss sampling, instrument design, ethical issues, data collection and data analysis.

## PART 1: Web Surveys

### Introduction

Aldridge and Levine (2001: 5) define social surveys as ‘a type of research strategy’ in the sense that these involve a general or strategic decision ‘about the way to set about gathering and analysing data’. This strategy, they continue, consists in ‘*that we collect the same information about all the cases in a sample*’. Usually, the cases are individual people, and among other things we ask all of them the same questions’ (Aldridge and Levine, 2001: 5, italics in original). The items of information or variables obtained are usually classified into 1) attributes or background information 2) behaviours and 3) opinions, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge etc. (Fife-Schaw, 2006: 223; Aldridge and Levine, 2001: 5).

### Justification

In this research project I have used web surveys as a main method for data collection. Web surveys’ best uses include when there is a need for wide geographic coverage, it is hoped to reach a large number of people, when dealing with internet savvy populations, and when there is access to valid e-mail addresses of potential participants (Fink, 2013: 11; Sills and Song, 2002; Bryman, 2016). All these situations apply to this research where I have sought to compare aspects of social work education in England and Spain, for what I needed as broad as possible geographic coverage and a high number of responses. Social work educators and social work students in English and

Spanish HEIs, given requirements of their roles as educators or students in these institutions can be expected to count with at least a basic internet literacy allowing them to use web surveys, and to be contactable through their HEIs email addresses with the help of gatekeepers at their institutions. A number of advantages of web surveys have motivated my selection of this research method and arguably benefitted this research. These include their low costs, real-time obtention of responses, advantages related to the automated data entry and, in comparison with paper based surveys, fewer unanswered questions and better response to open questions (Bryman, 2012: 676-677).

## Sampling

Fink (2013: 8) states, in relation to web surveys, that ‘except when done statistically, the desired response rate tends to be entirely subjective, and the general rule is “higher is better”’. Given the manageable number of HEIs offering social work qualifying courses, the possibilities for dissemination of the research web surveys amongst social work educators and final year students in England and Spain and my aim to maximize the number of responses, I decided to work with the entire populations of these institutions in each country rather than with samples, following a ‘census’ sampling approach (Bryman, 2016: 688). In 2012, the number of HEIs offering social work qualifying courses was 82 in England (GSCC, 2012), and 41 in Spain (Ministerio de Educación, 2012)]. Working with entire populations instead of samples enhances the possibilities for any of their members to be reached and invited to take part in the survey, reducing sampling error whereby the sample does not represent well the population (Sills and Song, 2002: 23). In this research, however, there is an additional layer to sampling, as I identified for each HEI relevant contact persons (normally social work programme leaders) and requested them to distribute the web surveys amongst social work educators and final year students in their institutions. Hence, in this research, the census approach increased the chances for individual social work educators and social work final year students to be selected for the survey, but this benefit was mediated by the HEIs gatekeepers’ decision to collaborate or not with the research and distribute the surveys.

Given the topic of this research, I have expected a degree of self-selection amongst the HEIs contact persons (gatekeepers), social work educators and final year students. Those with higher degrees of personal alignment with human rights and social justice principles and values in social work will have likely been more prone to collaborate with the research. I do not think a bias from this form of self-selection could have been avoided, but I have been mindful of the potential impact of such bias and taken this into account in the analysis and interpretation of survey findings. Although the degree to which this bias may have affected the research cannot be

specified, response rates and demographic data from web surveys have served to me as frameworks for reflection about the impact of self-selection in this research and leave open to alternative judgements about this by external readers of this research.

## Challenges in web survey research

The literature highlights a series of challenges and potential disadvantages of using web surveys. Most commonly discussed limitations of web surveys include low response rates (Bryman, 2012: 677), their restriction to internet literate and technologically equipped populations (Fink, 2013: 12; Bryman, 2012: 677; Robson, 2011: 248), difficulties for knowing sampling frames (Bryman, 2012: 677; Robson, 2011: 248) or reaching respondents (Fink, 2013: 12). It has been indicated above that, except for limitations on response rates, none of these limitations pose concerns for this research given the characteristics and accessibility of the population of study. Bryman (2012: 677) also highlights the possibility of mischievously intended multiple replies, but whilst there is always a small possibility that somebody might want to do this in order for example to increase their chances of winning the prize draw, I did not think this was, either, an area of concern. The open nature of many of the questions required quite personalised responses that respondents would not easily duplicate. And in order to access the draw prize and/or reports respondents needed to provide their email address (which were kept confidentially and separate from surveys responses). As there was no identifiable duplication of responses or emails in the survey data, nor were any responses which could be identified as 'mischievous' or intended to damage the research, I can confidently discard concerns in this regard.

In relation to the low response rates limitations, I took a series of measures which allowed me to obtain an approximately and a total number of responses for each of the surveys that allowed for fulfilling the purposes of this research. Firstly, the far reach of the census approach to sampling allowed for a significant amount of non-response without compromising the collection of enough data for a reliable analysis. Secondly, responses were encouraged through preliminary and encouraging initial contacts with HEIs gatekeepers, the provision of easy to read information on the research (including a brief and visual power-point presentation), the attractive design of the survey (as far as the software allowed), following up rounds of emails for gatekeepers and potential participants, and offering alternative methods for response when these are preferred or needed (such as postal or telephone survey formats).



## Ethics

Confidentiality and informed consent have been the two main ethical concerns in my use of web surveys in this research. Confidentiality, according to Fink (2013: 17) 'refers to the safeguarding of any information about one person that is known by another'. In many surveys, anonymity is not possible, as details such as email addresses or the responses to particular questions can lead to the identity of respondents. In those cases it is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to put in place existing techniques to protect the respondents' privacy and reassuring respondents that 'information will be used only with the person's knowledge and for clearly stated purposes' (Fink, 2013: 17). Hence the importance of ensuring the informed consent of participation through sound consent forms giving 'potential respondents sufficient written information to decide whether to complete a survey' in what regards the following dimensions (Fink, 2013: 18):

- The survey name and purpose
- A fair explanation of the procedures to be followed
- A description of risks and benefits [to respondents and society]
- Incentives for participation
- Confidential use of the data
- Conditions of participation and withdrawal
- Identification of surveyors and an offer to answer any inquiries

I addressed all these points in the contact emails and consent forms of the four web surveys (social work students- England and Spain and social work educators – England and Spain), which can be consulted in annex two, and I complied with my commitments to the participants during the research. For example, I never crossed their email addresses with the responses to particular questions during my data analysis, I was careful to avoid reporting responses or quotes that may have made participating individuals and/or institutions identifiable, or I fairly conducted the prize draw of participant students and delivered the prize to the randomly selected student. The specialized software used for the survey research (Bristol Surveys Online) accessed through University IT system enhanced an adequate management of confidentiality and anonymity. Data was managed and stored according to the research ethics approved protocol.

## Design of the surveys

Web surveys for social work teaching staff and final year social work students in the two countries are structured into three and four sections respectively. Open-ended questions and Likert scale questions are combined throughout the surveys.

In all surveys, the first section seeks to gather data related to the demographic characteristics and work/study details of the surveys' participants. The second section of the surveys consists of a common set of questions exploring social work educators and final year social work students' general views (attitudes, understandings and personal commitment) on human rights and social justice and their role in social work education. The format of some questions in this section are based with permission on a Survey of Primary School Teachers about Human Rights Education, by the Irish Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education (Waldron et al., 2011).

A third section in all the surveys contains a series of questions for social work educators and final year students about their experiences in teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in a social work course. The questions in this section vary from the educators and students' surveys. A fourth and final section seeks the perspectives of final year students on how human rights and social justice are operationalized in the Higher Education Institutions they are studying for a qualifying social work course, based on a set of questions which is specific to the students' surveys.

In terms of the contents and themes of questions included in the four web surveys, the design was informed at a broader level by the knowledge on the research topic gained through the review of the literature in the field (chapter two), which allowed me to identify some of the most relevant theories and debates around human rights and social justice in social work education globally. However, the specific design and structure of the survey was founded on the outcomes of my review of selected key documents from the IFSW and IASSW. A review of these documents allowed me to identify a list of recurrent underlying principles commonly linked with a human rights and social justice aligned social work education and/or practice. This particular set of documents was selected considering them as key instruments placed by these lead international social work organisations in order to offer guidance on the values, principles and practices social work education institutions internationally should pursue in order to train social workers according to social work human rights and social justice principles. These documents, the whole concept of international social work and the role of these lead international social work organisations are contested and subjected to criticisms of different nature (Solas, 2008; Yip, 2006;

Lavalette and Ioakimidis, 2011). However, I consider that despite limitations, these are valuable and legitimate reference documents, as these are a product of democratic professional organisations and have been subjected to consultation processes amongst the social work professional community worldwide.

**TABLE 3 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS INFORMING WEB SURVEY DESIGN**

<b>Documents analysed</b>			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Global standards for the education and training of the social work profession (Sewpaul and Jones, 2005)</li> <li>2. Ethics in Social Work. Statement of Principles (IASSW and IFSW, 2004)</li> <li>3. Human Rights and Social Work: A Manual for Schools of Social Work and the Social Work Profession (United Nations, 1994)</li> <li>4. Human Rights (IFSW, 2012)</li> <li>5. Standards in Social Work Practice meeting Human Rights (IFSW Europe, 2010)</li> </ol>			
<b>Principles for a human rights and social justice based social work education</b>			
Focus on HR and SJ contents and theories	Focus on social work ethics and principles.  -Addressing ethical dilemmas.	Appropriate and creative teaching methods  -Student choice and control over their learning  -Personalised support to students	Promotion of critical thinking and research skills
Role model of social work educators	Nondiscrimination and inclusiveness (cultural, ethnic and gender)	Service user involvement in social work education	Assessment of students' aptitude for a social work career

## Piloting the web surveys

The first drafts of the English versions of the surveys received written feedback from both supervisors and were thoroughly discussed with them. By including changes and ideas drawing from their feedback, I produced a series of improved versions of the four surveys. Then, I had the final English versions of the staff and students' surveys reviewed by a proofreader so the surveys' piloting could focus on the content of the questions' content rather than on the wording of these. I then uploaded the four surveys to the chosen web surveys software -Bristol Online Surveys- and launched these for piloting.

With the help of my first supervisor I requested the help with piloting the student survey to nine former students of the social work course at the University, most of which had completed the social work course the previous year. Five of them completed the survey and gave me their written feedback. One offered to have a more thorough Skype discussion in addition to the written feedback, which was very productive.

The majority of feedback was positive with most students stating that the survey was clear, comprehensive and easy to complete. One of them highlighted that completing the open survey questions required a lot of thought, what could be perceived as slightly overwhelming. In response I reviewed the open questions seeking to synthesise or eliminate some of these in order to shorten the surveys and reduce the amount of effort required from student respondents. Two of the students highlighted some questions which the wording could be clearer and helped suggesting alternative phrasings which could sound more natural or eliminate any ambiguity. I fully incorporated their suggestions for wording improvement. Two former students pointed out some limitations of specific closed questions, which did not allow for nuanced views, although they recognized this limitation related to the close nature of the question and therefore little could be done about it. I agreed that there was not much I could do about that and accepted the limitation which I hoped could be partially balanced by the possibility for respondents to express more nuanced views in other open questions and comment boxes (I added some more) throughout the survey. In relation to the technical side of the survey, several respondents highlighted it looked good and worked well although one mentioned they had missed of a "return" button that would allow to review or amend previous responses. Unfortunately, this was not an option in the BOS software.

I felt that some of this feedback was applicable to the social work educators' surveys and used this to improve and shorten the then current version. Then, I contacted the teaching staff involved in social work training at the University (ten staff members, in addition to my two supervisors) and requested their help with piloting this version of social work educators' surveys. Five people completed the surveys and gave their written feedback. This was positive feedback, in relation to the clarity of questions and the usability of web surveys (one respondent mentioned again they missed a "return" button), and it confirmed a desired completion time (no more than 20 min). As a response to a standard question, some respondents mentioned some areas they considered relevant to human rights and social justice in social work education and which the survey did not cover, such as women's rights or environmental issues. However, whilst the responses to this question from pilots and final surveys has yielded relevant data which has informed my interpretation of findings, I kept the surveys generic and open for respondents to focus on human rights and social justice areas/topics they considered more relevant.

In relation to the Spanish versions of the surveys, I did not pilot these in a similarly structured and formal way, given the facts that: 1) I did not have close connections with Spanish social work courses, 2) I believed the majority of feedback received from former social work students and social work educators in England was applicable to the Spanish surveys and, 3) being Spanish my mother tongue I was more confident of my use of language and in a better position to continuously proofread the surveys for clarity and to avoid writing mistakes.

Instead, I applied the feedback received from the English and sought more informal feedback on the survey amongst peers from my social work training (now qualified social workers) and amongst friends and family members with a background in social work / related social professions. I received feedback on the surveys from six people, who all confirmed the surveys were clearly worded and seemed appropriate for the purposes of the research. One of them commented however, along the lines of one of the former social work students in England, that some of the questions required thought and they did not remember much about it from the degree as they had completed their degree a long time ago. I discussed paper versions of the surveys with four of them and two people completed the surveys online and confirmed these worked well and were easy to use in a technical sense.

## Access and data collection

In preparation for the dissemination of web surveys, I had researched the websites of all the HEIs offering social work qualifying courses in England and Spain (lists obtained through the GSCC and Ministerio de Educacion websites) and identified the email addresses of contact persons or relevant institutional email addresses for each of these institutions. I decided to contact in principle social work programme directors although occasionally I also contacted social work departmental leaders or other types of managers of various social work programmes, such as in the case of institutions with several social work courses or when I could not locate contact details of programme leaders. In some instances, I sent email enquiries to information addresses from HEIs or phoned these in order to locate the most suitable person to contacting order to seek HEIs participation in the research.

In England, my first supervisor assisted me with seeking institutional support for the research, in order to ultimately reach a wider audience and increase response rates by enhancing trust in the research, by contacting the chairs of different JUCSWEC committees to ask the best route to seek support for this research from JUCSWEC, ideally by way of their formal recognition of the study. This request was reportedly discussed at a SWEC meeting. The response to the request indicated that whilst that SWEC did not feel to be in a position of “endorsing” independent research projects, they wanted to offer general support and encouragement. In particular, they could help with access to request participation through their email list, asserted to be open to consider involvement in/support for other related knowledge exchange activities, and to offer help with information sharing re research projects on the JUC SWEC website (then under re-development). They also invited me to ‘disseminate findings, through their committees (learning and teaching, research, international) and forums in which SWEC is involved’, and encouraged me to present these at the yearly JSWEC conference (I have recently presented my PhD research findings at the 2016 JSWEC conference).

My first supervisor and myself thought that sharing information of the research through the JSWEC email list, before my direct contact with the selected contact persons would benefit the attention, reception, and response to my initial contact emails. Having had rather thorough discussions on whether it would be better for me or the supervisor to write this email (we actually prepared both versions) we decided that it would be more beneficial overall if the contact was made by the supervisor. In these discussions we had considered issues of power, influence, expected use of this email list, trust, etc.

Following this email to JSWEC email list members from the supervisor, I proceeded to email the contact persons I had identified from each HEI in order to request their collaboration with the research by disseminating the web surveys amongst social work teaching staff and final year students in their institutions. I emailed each of these contacts separately, addressing them by their names and surnames, for a more personalised yet respectful initial contact. Generic initial contact email can be consulted in annex two. I followed up my request for collaboration with the research with two rounds of reminders, see annex two.

In Spain, I attempted to follow a parallel procedure for seeking institutional support for the research and the dissemination of web surveys by contacting the Conferencia de Trabajo Social (Conferencia de Decanos, Decanas, Directores y Directoras de Trabajo Social de la Universidad Española) which is a Spanish network of social work deans and programme directors, but they responded they could not help with this, although they signposted to their website where I could obtain the network members' email addresses and contact them directly for the study. This directory, together with information from the Universities' websites allowed me to identify contact persons and details to invite each of the Spanish Universities offering social work qualifying courses to take part in the research. Then, as with the contacts from English HEIs, I emailed each contact separately requesting their help with the dissemination of web surveys and followed up my request with two rounds of reminder emails. The contents of emails were the same in the two countries (differing in language) and timing of email rounds was approximately the same, too, spanning between June and October 2014. By the end of October 2014 the vast majority of data had been collected, and surveys were finally closed in December 2014.

## Data analysis and presentation of findings

The features of the software used -Bristol Online Surveys-, allowed for the responses to close questions to be automatically compiled and presented in frequency tables and basic descriptive charts as responses were received. However, a combined presentation of the four surveys results and comparative analysis of the responses to close questions from each of the web surveys required me to elaborate new tables and charts.

The responses to open questions of the web surveys were also compiled by the software, which allowed for the exploration of individual surveys as well as for overviews of all the responses to each of the questions. Reviewing the compiled responses to each of the questions allowed me to become familiar with both the quantitative and qualitative data from each of the surveys and to

start to notice differential and common patterns amongst the responses of the four groups of participants.

Once I had become familiar with the qualitative data from the four surveys, I set out to carry out a basic thematic coding analysis (Robson, 2011: 475) of these. For each of the four web surveys I created an excel document with individual spreadsheets for coding the responses to each of the open questions with numerous responses. For the responses to each of the open questions (within each survey document) and using excel tables, I conducted two rounds of manual inductive coding through which codes 'emerged from my interaction with the data' (Robson, 2011: 475). As the sample table of next page shows, as themes emerged from my orderly review of all the responses to each open question, I added new columns (or rearranged existing ones) with new codes which summarized the new themes identified and placed in the rows below the literal responses associated with each of the codes. Some responses were placed under several codes.

I conducted the second rounds of coding after having finished all the first rounds since at that stage I had a better overall insight of the qualitative data from the four surveys and could use previously coded material to ongoingly compare the relevant qualitative data from the different surveys. This helped increasing the standardisation of coding amongst the four surveys in this second round. After finishing the second round of coding I prepared for each coded question tables presenting, the resulting thematic codes and the number of respondents that elicited the themes, for the four web surveys. References to the number of valid responses for each of the questions were provided. These tables are presented in next chapter.

The charts and tables produced during this stage of the survey data analysis set the foundations for chapter six where I present survey data in an organized and systematic way. I also drew from some of these materials when carrying out the deeper and holistic overall critical realist interpretation of findings -from both surveys and qualitative interviews- presented in chapter seven. When developing chapter seven, however, I also went frequently back to the raw qualitative responses to open questions and cited extracts from these, for a more nuanced and "authentic" (representative of participants' worldviews) interpretation and reporting of findings.



FIGURE 3 EXAMPLE OF CODING OF STUDENTS' SURVEYS

Codes SW S													
File Home Insert Page Layout Formulas Data Review View													
Normal Page Break Preview Page Layout Views Ruler Formula Bar Gridlines Headings Zoom 100% Zoom to Selection													
Workbook Views Show Zoom													
D2 4. Bringing human rights into most lectures on													
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	Greater focus/commitment	Specific module/training events on the topic	Alignment of sw agencies with HR/SJ	Greater integration into sw training	Greater links theory-practice	Practice examples Case studies	More space for debate & discussion	Expertise of social work educators	Student experience of users' realities	Other			
1	11. Have a set topic on it and complete an assignment	13. Human rights module to be included specifically	32. The difficulty is that whatever one learns, there are always issues in the workplace following training. The QSWs I worked with on placement were often very stressed and felt overwhelmed with task. Often, this lead to a jaded worker who no longer considered human rights or social justice	4. Bringing human rights into most lectures on reflection to understanding its underlying importance in practice	25. More learning about linking human rights with social justice and how this can be incorporated into practice. Especially in statutory placements.	6. case studies	2. Active and honest participation in discussion.	1. A lecturer by people who have been to the European Human Rights.	3. experience days	3. Better training, resources and services should be in place to support professionals and service users.			
2													
2	14. I am a firm believer in dialogue and talking things through. Practice educators should be screened for their commitment to human rights etc.	17. Looking at SU perspective when HR were violated, having SU talking about their experience, seminar on sociology and contemporary history. make students aware about		26. more of a focus on this, modules on gender and feminist perspectives, workshop involving discussion and debate rather than just lectures on human rights and social justice issues, and integrating these messages		1. Case study examples based on real practice scenarios of how to apply this in practice; examples of how to approach complex and challenging situations and dilemmas; exploration via student-led practice learning groups where	10. Further discussions around challenging current practice post-qualifying.	21. More coverage of the subject as opposed to one or two lectures based on it, specialist speakers to make the topic more inviting as a discussion as a group, it may spark more healthy	1. Looking at SU perspective when HR were violated, having SU talking about their experience, seminar on sociology and contemporary history, make students aware about	5. Broader examination of international conditions experienced			
Students England difficulties studenENGLAND WHAT COULD IMPRO													

## PART 2: Qualitative Interviews

### Introduction

Fontana and Frey (2000: 645-646) assert that interviewing is one of the most powerful tools for human communication and understanding. Basically involving a person asking questions and another answering these questions, interviewing can take multiple forms and be used with many different purposes (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Robson and McCartan, 2016: 284). In social science research, interviewing is a widely used research method that can be used as a single method but which also 'lends itself well' to be used as part of multi-method research projects, such as this PhD (Robson and McCartan, 2016: 285).

In social research interviews are often classified, according to their level of structuring as structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Bryman, 2016). In this research, I conducted seven semi-structured interviews, four of these with social work educators from a Spanish University and the other three with social work educators from an English University. See interview schedule in annex three. In semi- structured interviews:

the interviewer has an interview guide that serves as checklist of topics to be covered and a default wording and order for the questions, but the wording and order are often substantially modified based on the flow of the interview, and additional unplanned questions are asked to follow up on what the interviewee says (Robson and McCartan, 2016: 285)

Bryman argues that semi-structured and unstructured interviews share their main characteristics, which include: a flexible process guided by the interviewee's answers; or the search for insights into interviewees' particular viewpoint and into their deep, 'rich, detailed' accounts of the subject being researched (Bryman, 2016: 466-467).

### Justification

With this small number of interviews, I have aimed to complement the survey data and explore in more depth some main topics covered in the surveys. For this, I sought participants' detailed viewpoints in relation to these topics which included their understandings of the relationship between human rights, social justice and social work, helpful experiences and barriers in their teaching about human rights and social justice in social work education, or what they thought could help enhance their teaching of human rights and social justice in social work education.

Moreover, given the critical realist nature of this research project, I have also used the interview scripts as 'texts' for critical discourse analysis whereby the contents or representations of the text are linked to more permanent underlying discourses and deeper ideologies and social structures (Fairclough, 2003). I believe based on my critical realist approach to research that these texts reflect aspects of the external social reality. But I acknowledge that the particular accounts offered by the interviewees are 'made' during the interview events and influenced by situational contexts and the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, as it is recognized from both interpretative and critical discourse analysis approaches to interview research (Fairclough, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: 47; Fontana and Frey, 2000: 663).

In sum, the aims of doing qualitative interviews in this research were to:

- Carry out an in-depth exploration of social work educators' experiences of teaching HR and SJ in a social work course
- Explore cultural understandings of the research topic
- Establish links with national contexts and social structures
- Explore discourses around HR and SJ in social work education
- Identify teaching practices and discourses that may help promote HR and SJ in social work education- defending this from the neoliberal attack to social work models based on HR and SJ principles and values

## Challenges in interview research

As Denzin and Lincoln (2008: 47) explain, interviews are not a neutral tool, but a site of 'power' and 'negotiated text'. Researchers are not invisible and neutral, but they influence the interview situation in which reality is created among him or her and the interviewee (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: 47; Fontana and Frey, 2000: 663). As human beings, both the interviewer and interviewee bring our knowledge on social interactions, our multiple identities and ambivalent (sometimes conflicting) attitudes, feelings and expectations to the research situation. Hence, for many qualitative writers this knowledge is inseparable from the context where it was gathered and unsuitable for being claimed as objective data if not framed within it (Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 183; Bryman, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: 47; Fontana and Frey, 2000: 663; Silverman, 2006).

Dealing appropriately with reflection on contexts and power dynamics affecting the interview is an ethical requirement and an important challenge in order to achieve good quality trustworthy knowledge through this research method. I expand on ethics in the next section. Another challenging area of interviewing relates to the fact that this is time-consuming, requiring a thorough and demanding preparation and arrangements, as well as time-consuming transcription and analysis processes (Robson and McCartan, 2016; Bryman, 2016). The limited number of interviews I carried out helped me managing time-related challenges.

Managing the order of questions flexibly and displaying good communication skills including active listening and managing silences and prompts, are important skills of interviewers in semi-structured interviewing research. Robson argues that the amount of flexibility and skill required 'calls for ... considerable experience in the interviewer' (Robson and McCartan, 2016: 289). Avoiding leading questions and comments which may influence and bias the respondent's answers is another skill that interviewers need to develop and implement (Robson and McCartan, 2016).

In relation to my previous experience as a social worker, and to having conducted a small number of research interviews for another research project before the fieldwork of this PhD, I felt rather confident in the interview situations. I felt I had the necessary basic communication skills, that I counted with a thoroughly prepared research and that I had carried out a good preparation for the interviews (from having established a relationship and common expectations with participants to being familiar with the topic). Therefore, during interviews, I could focus on doing my best in relation to leading the discussion, choosing an appropriate order of questions and displaying more advanced interviewing skills such as managing prompts, avoiding leading comments or comments which could generate bias.

Interviews were type recorded so I was also reassured that I would be able to listen to the detail of the information at a later stage and become familiar with this during the subsequent transcription and analysis work with the materials. This was important as keeping the focus on leading the interview and some instances where I had difficulty in understanding small parts of the speech of English speakers meant that I missed some details of the information from the interviews from both countries but particularly from England.

## Ethics

Research ethics are deeply intertwined with all stages of interview research fieldwork, as well as with data analysis, interpretation and dissemination of findings. During these stages I made sure to comply with fundamental research principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity and data protection. The information sheets and consent forms for interviewees are attached (see annex three), and I complied with the University approved ethics protocol for this research in relation to confidentiality, anonymity and data protection. Beyond this, I engaged with reflexivity and paid close attention to issues of power as key ethical matters in relation to the research interviews.

D'Cruz (2000: 2.2) asserts that in qualitative research, research ethics involve 'complex and shifting micro practices of power/knowledge between researcher and researched' (1.1). This involves practical decisions and reflection on situations related to aspects such as:

- the access to interviewing settings
- how I presented myself to the different subjects involved in the research process;
- the mutual cultural understanding between the interviewer and interviewee (in this case this could be applicable in a literal sense as well as with regard to social work's technical language and institutional cultures)
- how trust and rapport between the researcher and respondents was gained
- or what kind of ethical relationship and reciprocity was established among interviewer and interviewee

(Fontana and Frey, 2000; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Homan, 1992; Christians, 2000).

My reflections on the interview context and situation, including how I presented myself and how the relationship established with respondents may have impacted the accounts and responses displayed by these (Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 183; Bryman, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: 47; Fontana and Frey, 2000: 663; Silverman, 2006) will be discussed in chapter six. I next discuss sampling, recruitment, and access to interviewees.

## Sampling and recruitment

I have stated before that the initial design of this research project predicted the use and combination of two methods for data collection: large scale web surveys of social work teaching staff and final year students, and the case study of a HEI providing qualifying courses in social work in each country (England and Spain). However, I eventually discontinued the case studies after having conducted a small number of interviews with teaching staff at the institutions that had agreed to be case studies in this research. There are two reasons for this decision to simplify research methods during the research.

The first of these reasons relates to the fact that, once I managed to finish the seven interviews, I was facing time pressures in relation to the progress of the PhD research, and I was realizing that, given my lack of research experience, I had underestimated the workload involved in conducting broader case studies alongside web survey research. Problems with recruitment of a volunteering HEI in England which I explain next had led to an important delay in my progress, and several weeks after finishing the interviews I had not yet succeeded in my attempts to organize focus groups with final year students in either country due to unavailability of key gatekeepers.

But second and most importantly, after conducting the interviews and increasingly as I became more familiar with their data through transcription and preliminary analysis, I started to appreciate that the data obtained from interviews was richer than I expected, highly self-sufficient, and that this could be used in combination to web survey data to offer comprehensive and coherent answers to the research questions and fulfill the research objectives. Therefore, I concluded that conducting full case studies would be very extremely difficult, unnecessary, and undesirable as even if I had the time and capacity to develop these case studies fully, the resulting findings would be too abundant, complex and difficult to handle within PhD research.

Given all the above, sampling and recruitment of interviewees need to be framed within the strategies devised in relation to the originally designed case study research. My first decisions in relation to sampling institutions for potential case study sites (where I could study the role of human rights and social justice in social work education) considered convenience criteria, in order to reduce fieldwork costs.

Based on this criterion, in Spain, I decided to approach Universities based on locations where I had family who could offer accommodation. The first institution I approached was willing to participate as a case study in this research, so recruitment for a case study was very quick and

unproblematic in this country. The social work head of department was my contact person and gatekeeper during the research.

In England, I decided to approach institutions within the region of the University or easily accessible through public transport. I identified with my first supervisor four potential institutions and we decided to approach these one by one. As with the case of web surveys, we decided that the supervisor would make the initial contact with social work programmes' contact persons for a more equal communication and power balance. However, none of these four institutions was willing, or in a position, to participate in this research. From one of these it was explained their social work undergraduate programme (target of my case studies) was undergoing significant change and the social work team had made a consensus decision (in a team meeting) not to participate in the research. In a second institution, the request to participate was passed on to a person in an institutional management position. Unfortunately, this person did not respond to the request, included after two reminders separated by several months. A third institution responded they could not engage with the research as the staff was 'too pressured' by workloads at that moment. The fourth institution responded in an initially positive but eventually disconcerting way to our request. This institution's social work undergraduate programme leader had expressed their interest in participating in the research, and agreed to this (signing an informed consent form) after a meeting aimed to discuss the details of the case studies, confirm consent and start case study arrangements. However, a month later this person informed my supervisor that the relevant University Dean had decided that this institution 'should not participate in the research'. When asked if they had given a reason, the programme leader asserted no reason had been given to them.

These processes (which included careful contact, explanations on the research, waiting for answers, reminders, etc.) led to a delay in the fieldwork and to some disappointment on both mine and my supervisor's part. These responses, legitimate (although not equally polite) as they are, also raised questions on the extent HEIs in the region might have perceived the research as overwhelming or even threatening in relation to the research topic or the intrusive methodology that was proposed. At that stage, I was only starting to become aware of the extent to which the topics of human rights and social justice in social work were contested in social work in England, but I concluded on reflection, that both this topic and a possible fear of programmes and staff being 'scrutinized' by case study research conducted from a prestigious university could have definitely played a role in these responses.

Given the situation, and following thorough discussions with supervisors, I decided to engage with a purposive sampling and start to approach through supervisors' contacts and networks higher education institutions whose BSc programmes had a reputation of a commitment to social justice values. I had taken the initial decision of approaching HEIs in the region as I thought I could obtain from them a more neutral and representative insight into the tensions and complex experiences of social work educators and students in relation to teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in a social work course. But purposive sampling targeting HEIs with an overt social justice commitment had been considered a good option from the beginning of the research, given the fact that the research sought to identify transferable good practices and engage with a 'positive critique' (Fairclough, 2010: 20) that would highlight sources, discourses and strategies of resistance to the spread of neoliberal ideology in social work education. Neoliberal ideology arguably contradicts social work values of human rights and social justice. Moreover, the Spanish University that had agreed to participate as a case study did have an overt commitment to humanist and social justice value based education, as it was stated in University and social work department's mission statements, and reflected throughout the programme's information and documentation accessible through their public website.

Given all this, I was very confident that this shift towards purposive sampling in England would not only help solving my recruitment difficulties and delay, but it would also benefit and streamline the research. Once the decision was made, supervisors initiated communications through their networks and an institution in England with these characteristics willing to participate in the research was found very soon. This was a University offering Undergraduate and Postgraduate social work degrees.

I organised initial meetings with one person from each University (Spanish and English), following which both formally gave consent for the research to take place in their social work departments and agreed to act as contact persons and support the research at their institutions. With the assistance of these gatekeepers, I contacted the social work teaching staff from these institutions in order to provide them with information on the research and invite them to participate in the case study interviews. Then I arranged the interviews in each country with those who agreed to take part. Interviewees were informed of the changes in methodology and the changed role of their interviews in this research and they were offered an opportunity to raise any issues with this which I would sort together with them, but none were raised.



## Data analysis and presentation of findings

I personally transcribed the interviews, and this process allowed me to become familiar with their data. After that I started to work with the transcript texts in two phases. In a first phase of content analysis, I initially read each transcript several times, manually highlighting key ideas and making notes about my thoughts feelings or insights in relation to the data. Still within the content analysis phase, I systematically coded in the interview texts the content associated to each of the interview questions using Nvivo software. As the outcome of this phase of data analysis, I produced brief summaries of the contents of each interview, and an overview of the patterns found in the interviews from each country. These summaries are presented in chapter six.

In a second phase, I carried out a more systematic and in-depth analysis of the interview texts, using elements of critical discourse analysis, and assisted by Nvivo. In particular, I drew from Fairclough's (2003; 2010; 2014 [1989]) general ideas in relation to critical discourse analysis, although I focused on very specific areas of his broad and complex text analysis methodology framework. Having considered engaging with other approaches to discourse analysis such as those inspired by Foucault, I chose to draw from Fairclough's ideas because of his focus on how 'discursive agency interacts with underlying social structure' and the emphasis on explanation of discursal events (Curtis, 2014: 1757). Fairclough's (2010: 7) approach to critical discourse analysis of texts has a dual focus on 1) linguistic analysis and 2) interdiscursive analysis. It is the latter area of discourse analysis which I found relevant for this research.

At the core of Fairclough's concepts in relation to 'interdiscursive' analysis there are the 'linguistic elements of social practices' he calls 'orders of discourse' and defines as follows (Fairclough, 2003: 24):

An order of discourse is a network of social practices in its language aspect. The elements of orders of discourse are not things like nouns and sentences (elements of linguistic structures), but discourses, genres and styles...These elements select certain possibilities defined by languages and exclude others – they control linguistic variability for particular areas of social life.

Genres, such as for example interviews (or lectures or political pamphlets) are 'ways of (inter) acting' linguistically (Fairclough, 2003: 66). Discourses are 'ways of representing' aspects of the world, including the social world, but which 'transcend' and are more permanent than specific representations, and can generate many of these. Alternative discourses, which can be competing, are associated to people in different social positions (Fairclough, 2003: 123). Very

importantly for this research, Fairclough highlights that discourses have a fundamental role in the reproduction or overcoming of oppressive ideology

Discourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather is seen to be), they are also projective, imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions. Discourses constitute part of the resources which people deploy in relating to one another – keeping separate from one another, cooperating, competing, dominating – and in seeking to change the ways in which they relate to one another (Fairclough, 2003: 124)

The last of these three elements of discourse: styles ‘–or ways of being’ relate to ‘social identities’ (including value systems) (Fairclough, 2003: 26). Each of these “orders of discourse” are enacted and influence the construction of particular texts. These are at the same time affected and framed by deeper social structures, such as socio-economic structures, social class or language, which frame the potential expressions of the orders of discourse (Fairclough, 2003: 23).

In my critical discourse analysis inspired analysis of qualitative interviews, I conducted using Nvivo two rounds of systematic search for discursal and style-related contents (the interview gender of the text was clear without the need for further analysis). During the analysis, I identified and labelled the different discursal statements I encountered, creating codes for each of these and classifying under those codes the various expressions of that discourse I found in the interview texts. I re-organised and reviewed the codes and the coding structure ongoingly, for example merging or dividing codes, or changing their label names for better accuracy. In addition, I coded any references I found to social structures and to history, as these were areas of interest for my analysis.

The resulting coded text and coding structure allowed me to identify and classify discursal statements found in the interviews, an analysis which I could link with reflections on ideology, social structures, understandings of human rights and social justice, and change proposals in my interpretation of findings (chapter seven). The outcomes of the content and discourse analyses of qualitative interviews were used to build the holistic and multi-method (web surveys and interviews) based interpretation of research findings, presented in chapter seven. In chapter seven, and as with the case of the surveys’ raw qualitative data, I also refer to quotes from interviews’ original text in order to convey as accurately as possible the participant’s authentic views guiding my arguments.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the use of web surveys and qualitative interviews to explore the research questions of this thesis. For each of these empirical research methods I have considered advantages, challenges and limitations, sampling, instrument design, ethics, and the processes of data collection and data analysis. I have highlighted how survey open questions played an important role in allowing me to gather large numbers of qualitative responses to questions from social work educators and students in both countries. This allowed for the discovery of new themes which I was able to follow up in further interviews. Responses to closed questions in the surveys were analysed to produce descriptive statistics while thematic analysis was used to identify themes and patterns emerging from responses to open questions. Research interviews with social work educators from one University in each country allowed me to explore in greater depth their experiences of teaching HR and SJ in the context of social work education, explore cultural understandings of the research topic, develop deeper understanding of links with national contexts and social structures, and explore discourses around HR and SJ in social work education in each country. These interviews also helped me to identify teaching practices and discourses that may help promote HR and SJ in social work education.

In the following chapter I will present the web survey and interview data.

# CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH FINDINGS I: PRESENTING THE WEB SURVEY AND INTERVIEW DATA

## Introduction

The structure of the two findings chapters of this thesis mirrors the logic of the critical realist model of Danermark et al (2000) which I have adapted for this research by reducing their proposed process of six stages to the four stages of: 1) description, 2) analytical resolution, 3) theoretical redescription (abduction) and retroduction, 4) concretisation and contextualisation.

This chapter will cover 1) description and 2) analytical resolution and comprises two parts presenting respectively the web survey data and interview data.

## Part 1: Web survey of social work educators and social work final year students in England and Spain

### Introduction

This part of the chapter, presenting the survey research findings, is structured in four sections which mirror the structure of the surveys. Hence, the presentation of the research findings follows the order of the questions in the surveys. However, this order has been changed when convenient for clearer reporting of findings and interpretation.

The first of the sections introduces the demographic characteristics and work/study details of the surveys' participants, namely social work educators and social work final year students from English HEI and social work educators and social work final year students from Spanish HEIs. The

second section presents their responses to the surveys' common set of questions exploring their general views (attitudes, understandings and personal commitment) on human rights and social justice and their role in social work education. The third section presents the responses of social work educators and final year students to a series of questions about their experiences in teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in a social work course. The questions in this section vary between the educators and students' surveys. A fourth section signposts to further data regarding the perspectives of final year students on how human rights and social justice are operationalized in the Higher Education Institutions they are studying for a qualifying social work course. This data can be consulted in annex 1.

## 1. Demographic data and work/study details

### Participating HEIs

As indicated in chapter five (Methodology II), I sent an invitation to participate in this research to all the HEIs providing social work qualifying courses in England and Spain. This resulted in a self-selected sample of participating HEIs in both countries. 23 out of 83 HEIs in England and 13 out of 39 Universities in Spain engaged with this research; this implies 27.7 % and 33.3 % response rates respectively. In total, 36 HEIs participated in this research.

**TABLE 4 RESPONSE RATES HEIS**

Survey	Educators England	Educators Spain	FY Students England	FY Students Spain
Number of HEIs distributing the surveys	19/83 (22.9%)	11/39 (28.2%)	13/83 (15.7%)	10/83 (12%)
Total HEIs England 23/83 (27.7%)				
Total HEIs Spain 13/39 (33.3%)				
Total participating HEIs <b>36</b>				

## Respondents to the surveys

A total of 224 valid surveys were collected. 41 social work educators in England, 35 social work educators in Spain, 56 social work final year students in England, and 92 social work final year students in Spain responded to their corresponding surveys.

**TABLE 5 SURVEY RESPONSES**

Survey	Educators England	Educators Spain	FY Students England	FY Students Spain
Number of valid surveys	41*	35*	56*	92*
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Female</i>
	26 (63.4%)	16 (45.7%)	46 (82.1%)	68 (73.9%)
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Male</i>
	15 (36.6%)	19 (54.3%)	10 (17.9%)	24 (26.1%)
Total <b>224</b>				

\*Unknown response rates

## Social work educators

### Gender

63.4% of the social work educators in England indicated they were female and 36.6% indicated they were male. Such gender distribution perfectly mirrors the official UK statistics on the gender of HEIs academic staff in the subject area of social work and social policy, which report a 64% of female and a 36% of male academics in the subject area (Equality Challenge Unit, 2014). In Spain, 45.7% of the respondents to the survey of social work educators indicated they were female and 54.35% indicated they were male. However, the official data on the gender distribution of the teaching staff ascribed to departments of social work and social services in the Spanish universities<sup>4</sup> suggests -exactly as in the UK- a 64% of female social work teaching staff, against a

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<sup>4</sup> disaggregated by subject areas of social work and social services

36% of male social work teaching staff (Ministry of Education Culture and Sport, 2015). Hence, the overrepresentation of male educators amongst the respondents to this particular survey needs to be noted.

### *Years of social work teaching experience*

Table 6 shows the years of teaching experience reported by the social work educators collapsed into seven year ranges. Table 7 shows the mean, standard deviation and ranges of their responses. As these tables illustrate, the years of teaching experience reported by the participating social work educators from England and Spain were rather similar: 12.5 years in England and 14.2 in Spain (table 7). However, in the case of Spain there was wider spread of responses (table 7) with a notably higher proportion than in England of educators with 26 or more years of social work teaching experience (table 6).

**TABLE 6 FREQUENCIES. YEARS OF EXPERIENCE TEACHING SOCIAL WORK IN A HEI**

Years Teaching Experience	Educators England		Educators Spain	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
0-1 Years	2	4.9	2	5.7
2-5 Years	9	21.9	10	28.6
6-10 Years	7	17.1	5	14.3
11-15 Years	9	22.0	4	11.4
16-20 Years	7	17.0	5	14.3
21-25 Years	5	12.2	2	5.7
Over 26 Years	2	4.9	7	20.0
Total	41	100	35	100
No response	0		0	

TABLE 7 DESCRIPTIVES. YEARS OF EXPERIENCE TEACHING SOCIAL WORK IN A HEI

Social Work Educators England						
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Range
Years Teaching Experience	41	12,51	7,934	0	30	30

Social Work Educators Spain						
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Range
Years Teaching Experience	35	14,16	11,857	1	43	42

### Work details

35 (out of 41) social work educators in England disclosed their work positions. Most of them indicated their academic grade: 4 lecturers, 14 senior/principal lecturers, 3 teaching fellows and 4 professors. 3 social work educators indicated they were practice tutors. Other 3 educators reported their role as social work course leaders and another 4 educators indicated they were heads of social work departments. Thus, respondents to this survey in England held a variety of work roles and positions, although there was a high representation of educators with more senior roles.

All the respondents to the survey of social work educators in England indicated whether they worked full or part time, and 39 (out of 41) indicated whether they carried out on site and/or distance teaching. 78% (n=32) of the social work educators in England worked full-time and 21, 9% (n=9) part-time. 38 social work educators asserted they taught on site, with 6 of them also carrying out distance /online teaching. Only one respondent reported to carry out distance/online teaching exclusively.

24 (out of 35) social work educators in Spain disclosed their work positions. Most of them referred to the type of employment contract with their universities (which in the Spanish system of Higher Education reflect progression milestones): 7 *profesores titulares de Universidad*, 1 *profesor agregado*, 1 *profesor interino*, 1 *profesor colaborador*, 1 *profesor ayudante*, and 4 *profesores asociados*. 7 respondents indicated to be *profesores* [teachers], not specifying further. 2 educators reported their role as social work course leaders. Whilst only about half of the respondents in Spain provided detailed information on their work position, the pattern of their responses resembles that of social work educators in England. The educators indicated to hold a range of work roles and positions, with an important representation of senior post holders.





All the respondents to the survey of social work educators in Spain indicated whether they worked full or part time and whether they carried out on site and/or distance teaching. 68,6% (n=24) of the social work educators in Spain worked full-time and 31,4% (n=11) part-time. All the social work educators in Spain asserted they taught on site, with 1 of them also carrying out distance /online teaching.

## Social work final year students

### *Social work course and learning mode*

**TABLE 8 SOCIAL WORK TRAINING PROGRAMME (ENGLAND)**

Social work training programme: ENGLAND. Non applicable in Spain.				
1	BA/BSc:		69.5%	41
2	MA/MSc/MSW:		30.5%	18
3	Step up to Social Work:		0.0%	0

In England, 69.5% (n=41) of the participants were studying for an undergraduate degree in social work (BA/BSc). The remaining 30.5% (n=18) were studying at postgraduate level (MA/MSc/MSW).

In Spain, social work qualifications can only be obtained through the undergraduate university degree *Grado en Trabajo Social*.

Most students in both countries (96.6%, n=57 in England; 90.6%, n=77 in Spain) were studying full-time. Virtually all the students were studying on site, with the exception of two students in Spain.

### *Gender*

82.1% (n=46) of the social work final year students in England indicated they were female and 17.8% (n=10) indicated they were male. This is a good match with the national gender profile of social work students and social worker workforce, as in the cohorts 2009/10 – 2012/13, between 83% -84% of enrolling students were female, a percentage which coincides with the gender make-up of professional social workers (Skills for Care, 2015: 10).

In Spain, 73.9% (n=68) of the respondents to the survey of social work final year students indicated they were female and 26.1% (n=24) indicated they were male. According to the Department for Education's statistics between 81% -84% of enrolling social work students were female, hence men are slightly over-represented amongst the final year student respondents from Spain (Ministerio de Educación Cultura y Deporte, 2016). Around 90% of the social workers in Spain are female (Torices Blanco, 2011).

### Age

The average age of social work final year students is 24,8 for respondents from Spain and 32,4 for the respondents from England. These age averages and distributions, minus the three or four years of social work study, match well national age profiles for social work enrolling profiles enrolling social work courses in the years 2009/10 or 2010/11 (years the majority of students from the survey cohort are expected to have enrolled in both countries) (Ministerio de Educación Cultura y Deporte, 2016; Skills for Care, 2015).

**TABLE 9 DESCRIPTIVES. AGE OF SOCIAL WORK FINAL YEAR STUDENTS IN ENGLAND AND SPAIN**

<b>Final Year Social Work Students England</b>					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age FY Students	54	20	55	32,44	9,577

<b>Final Year Social Work Students Spain</b>					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age FY Students	92	20	52	24,79	6,793

**TABLE 10 FREQUENCIES. AGE OF SOCIAL WORK FINAL YEAR STUDENTS ENGLAND AND SPAIN**

Age of Final Year Students	Students England		Students Spain	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
18-20	2	3.7	7	7.6
21-25	14	25.9	64	69.5
26-30	8	14.8	8	8.7
31-35	13	24.1	6	6.5
36-40	6	11.1	2	2.2
41-45	7	13	2	2.2
46-50	0	0	1	1.1
Over 50	4	7.4	2	2.2
Total	54	100	92	100
No response	2		0	

## 2. Social work educators and social work final year students' views on human rights and social justice in social work education

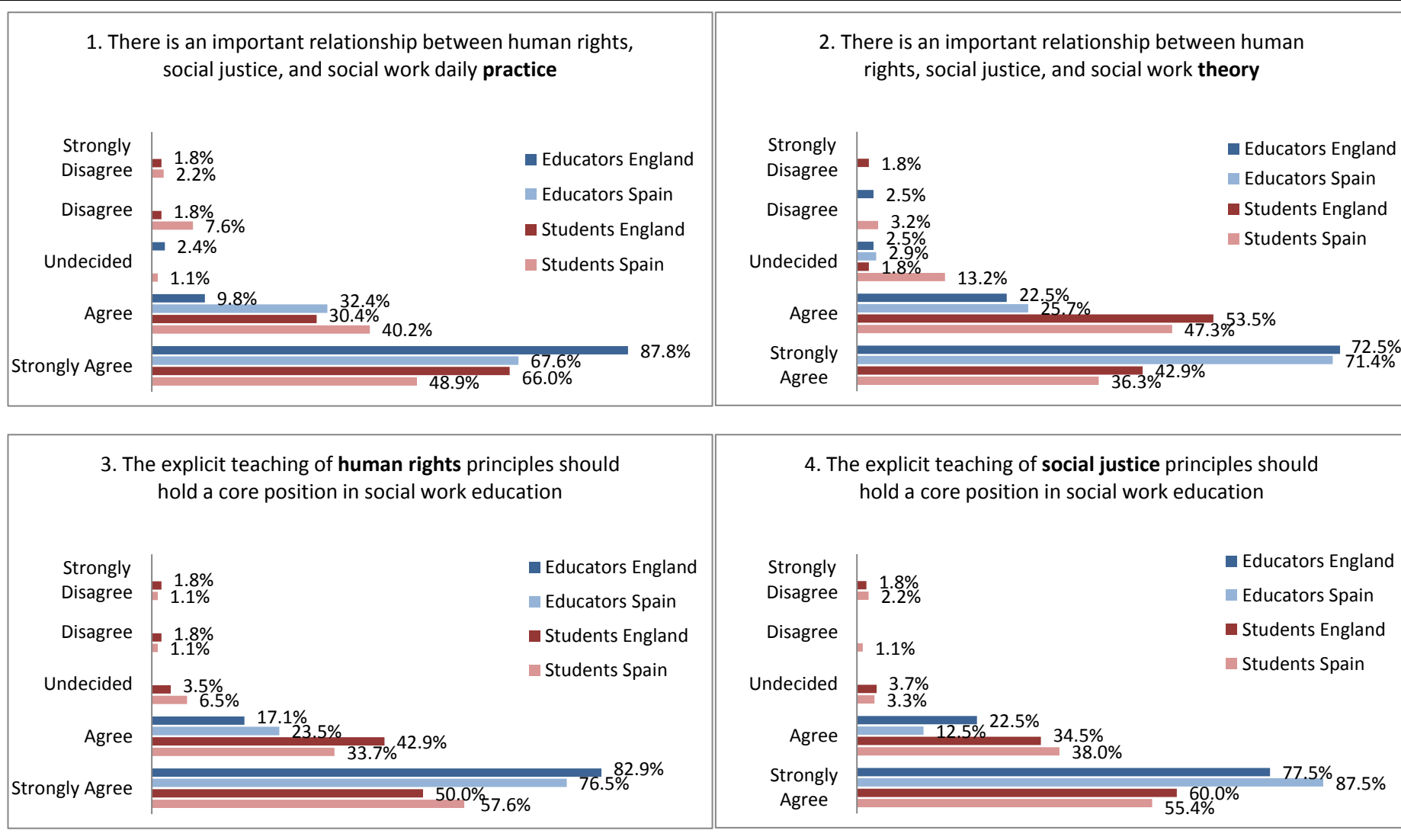
This section will report answers to the survey questions seeking to explore the general views (in particular attitudes, understandings and personal commitment) of social work educators and final year students in England and Spain on human rights and social justice and their role in social work education.

### General views on human rights and social justice in social work education

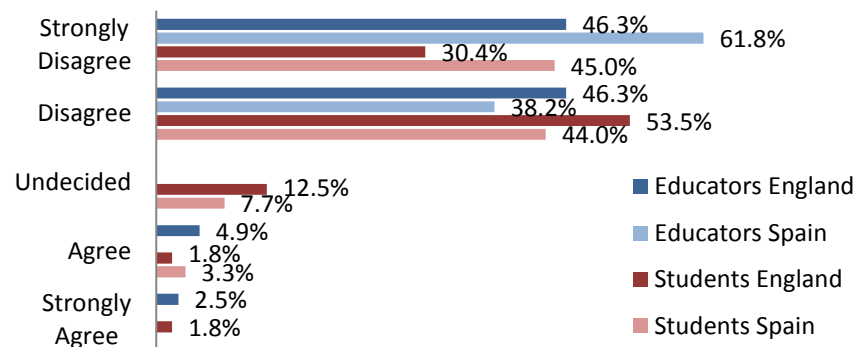
Social work educators and final year students in England and Spain were asked, in a grid question, to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of short statements about human rights and/or social justice in social work education. This was Q6 of social work educators' surveys both in England and Spain, Q8 in social work final year students' survey in England, and Q7 in social work final year students' survey in Spain. This grid question included 11 statements. The responses of 8 of these are presented next. Answers to the remaining questions will be discussed in section three (experiences in teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in a social work course) where I believe these fit better.

The following tables offer an overview of the responses to these statements of the four surveyed groups. They show the percentage of respondents from each group choosing the different levels of agreement or disagreement with the statements. Percentages on these tables are calculated on the basis of the number of responses to each statement, which nevertheless pretty much correspond with the total number of respondents to each survey as no response to these statements was very low. After the table, I present a summary of social work educators and final year students' answers to this grid question

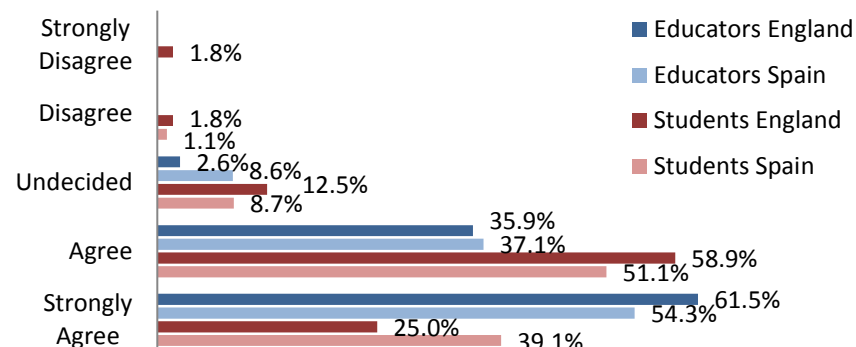
**TABLE 11 SOCIAL WORK EDUCATORS AND FINAL YEAR STUDENTS' GENERAL VIEWS ON HR AND SJ IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION**



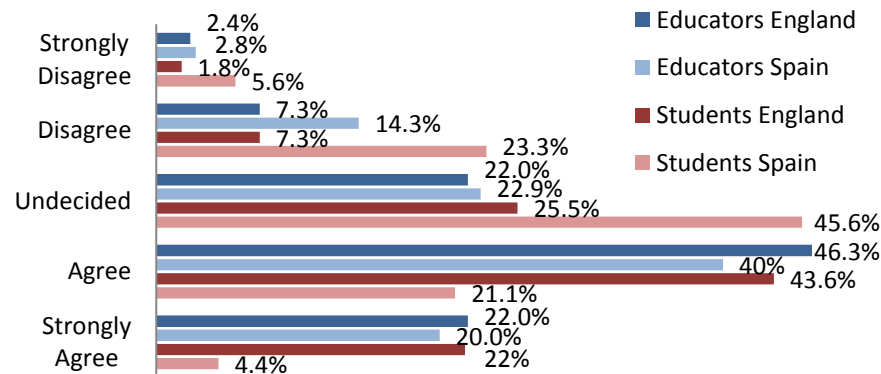
5. Human rights and social justice are aspirational, It is unrealistic to expect social workers to achieve these



6. Extending **human rights** perspectives into social work education would improve social work practice



7. Social work students will find opportunities to work for human rights and social justice in their professional careers



8. Most social work students will find themselves working in contexts that will make it difficult for them to apply human rights and social justice perspectives in their practice

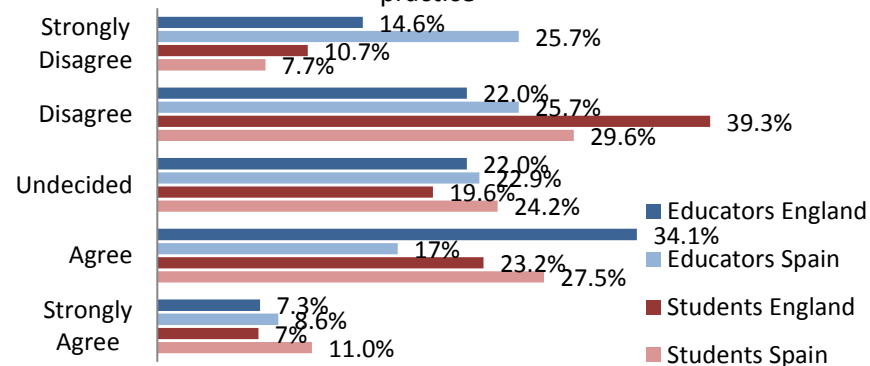


Table 11 continued

The social work educators in England and Spain unanimously and strongly believed that “there is an important relationship between human rights, social justice, and social work theory and practice” (statements 1 and 2). The majority of social work final year students in both countries shared their educators’ views and agreed with this, too. However, the overall levels of agreement of the students were slightly lower than the educators’ and a small number of the students disagreed or were undecided. 3.6% of the students in England and about 10% of the students in Spain either disagreed or strongly disagreed that “there is an important relationship between human rights, social justice and social work **daily practice**”. Whilst only the 1.8% of the students in England and 3.2% of the students in Spain disagreed that “there is an important relationship between human rights, social justice and social work **theory**”, a minority but noticeable 13.2% of the social work students in Spain were undecided about this.

All the social work educators in England and Spain agreed (the high majority strongly agreed) that “the explicit teaching” of both human rights and social justice principles “should hold a core position in social work education” (statements 3 and 4). The majority of the social work final year students in both countries also agreed with this, although their responses were more scattered amongst the two levels of agreement. Besides, for each of these two statements, there was a small number of students (about 7% in each country) who were undecided, disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The vast majority of the social work educators and final year students in both countries disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “human rights and social justice are aspirational, it is unrealistic to expect social workers to achieve these” (statement 5). The most optimistic about the role of social workers in achieving human rights and social justice were the social work educators in Spain, followed by the social work educators in England, and then by the two groups of students, which views on this statement were rather similar overall. A small number of the social work educators in England and of the students in both countries were undecided (7.7% of students in Spain, 12% of students in England), agreed (4.9% of educators in England, 3.3% of students in Spain, 1.8% of students in England) or strongly agreed (2.5% of educators in England, 1.8% of students in England) with this statement.

None of the social work educators in England or Spain disagreed with the statement that “extending human rights perspectives into social work education would improve social work practice” (statement 6), and the majority of them strongly agreed with it. Similarly, most of the students in both countries either agreed or strongly agreed with this (83.9 %, n=47 in England;

90.2%, n=83). Virtually all the remaining students were undecided and just one (Spain) or two (England) students disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The social work educators in England and Spain, as well as the social work students in England responded in a very similar manner to the statement that “social work students will find opportunities to work for human rights and social justice in their professional careers” (statement 7). About 65% of them agreed or strongly agreed with this, around 25 % were undecided and the remaining 10% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. However, the social work students in Spain had a worse prospect about the future opportunities for social work students to work for human rights and social justice in their careers. Only 25.5% (n=23) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 45.6% (n=41) were undecided, and 28.9% (n=26) disagreed or strongly disagreed with it.

The responses to the statement that “most social work students will find themselves working in contexts that will make it difficult for them to apply human rights and social justice perspectives in their practice” (statement 8) varied significantly amongst the four surveyed groups. Half of the students in England disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, about 30% agreed or strongly agreed and 19.6 % were undecided. The social work educators in England had a less positive view of the social work contexts of practice in what regards the possibilities to apply human rights and social justice principles. Only 36.6 % disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, 22% were undecided and 41.4% agreed or strongly agreed with it. Conversely, half of the social work educators in Spain did not see the social work context of practice as limiting of the possibilities to apply human rights and social justice principles, as about 52% of them disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Nevertheless, about 25% of them did agree or strongly agree with it, and 23% were undecided. The views of the social work students in Spain were scattered amongst the different levels of agreement with the statement in a normal-like distribution of responses.



## Views on most relevant issues for social work regarding human rights and social justice

The second question in this section of the surveys was an open-ended question which asked respondents what they thought were the most relevant issues for social work regarding human rights and social justice in different contexts. This was Q7 in the social work educators' surveys in England and Spain, Q9 in the social work student' survey in England and Q8 in the social work students' survey in Spain.

The tables in next pages show the responses of the four surveyed groups. The themes mentioned by the respondents are organised under thematic labels. For each label, the number of respondents highlighting an issue related to the theme is given. Some respondents raised several issues, and a small number of the issues highlighted by respondents needed to be accounted into more than one category.

As a means of summarising the main findings from this survey question, I next comment on the three most relevant topics for human rights and social justice identified by the four groups of respondents in the international and national contexts.

### *International context*

For the social work educators in England, the most relevant issues for social work regarding human rights and social justice in the international context were related to 1) discrimination (in general, racism, sexism and based on sexual orientation); 2) human trafficking/slavery and 3) poverty. For the social work educators in Spain the most relevant issues were related to 1) inequality and 2) migrations, followed by issues related to poverty, discrimination (gender and minorities) and violence (state, domestic, against women).

For the final year social work students in England issues related to 1) migrations, 2) war and 3) discrimination (general, racism, sexism) were the most relevant. And for the social work final year students in Spain issues of 1) (in)equality were the most important, followed by 2) migrations/borders and by 3) concerns about the applicability of universal human rights.

### *National contexts of the UK and Spain*

Considering the context of the UK, the most important human rights and social justice issues for social work according to the social work educators in England were related to 1) poverty, 2) welfare rights/politics, and 3) discrimination/diversity (general, racism, sexism, based on sexual orientation). The social work final year students in England highlighted issues related to 1) the

welfare system/ austerity, 2) (in) equality, and 3) social work workplace conditions (bureaucracy, budgets, resources, CPD, stress).

Regarding the national context of Spain, the issues pointed out by the social work educators in this country revolved around 1) inequality, 2) immigration and 3) social exclusion and the welfare system/austerity. On their part, the social work final year students in Spain highlighted the importance of issues related to 1) (in)equality, 2) welfare rights /politics, and 3) unemployment and housing.

**TABLE 12 VIEWS ON RELEVANT ISSUES RE HR AND SJ INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

<p><i>What do you think are the most relevant issues for social work regarding human rights and social justice in the <b>international context</b>?</i></p>	
<p>SW EDUCATORS ENGLAND</p> <p>37 valid answers</p>	<p>SW EDUCATORS SPAIN</p> <p>31 valid answers</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discrimination (general, racism, sexism, based on sexual orientation) (n=15)</li> <li>2. Human trafficking/slavery (n=9)</li> <li>3. Poverty (n=8)</li> <li>4. Asylum seekers/refugees (n=7)</li> <li>5. Violence against women (n=5)</li> <li>6. Globalisation (n=5)</li> <li>7. Welfare rights (n=5)</li> <li>8. Exploitation/ employment rights (n=4)</li> <li>9. Migration (n=4)</li> <li>10. Ageing populations (n=3)</li> <li>11. War (n=3)</li> <li>12. Homelessness (n=2)</li> <li>13. Politics (n=2)</li> <li>14. International perspective in social work (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): Advocacy, critique UN agenda, Relationship HR-Ethics, legal aspects of HR, exclusion, anti-colonialism, marketization, power and control, domestic abuse, child abuse, environmental concerns, resources, freedom of thought and religion, inequality</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inequality (n=10)</li> <li>2. Migrations (n=9)</li> <li>3. Poverty (n=5)</li> <li>4. Discrimination (gender, minorities) (n=5)</li> <li>5. Violence (state, domestic, against women) (n=5)</li> <li>6. Welfare rights (n=3)</li> <li>7. Neoliberal globalisation (n=3)</li> <li>8. International legislation and justice (n=3)</li> <li>9. International development (n=2)</li> <li>10. Environmental concerns (n=2)</li> <li>11. Social work ethics, methods or theory (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): Promotion of HR, influence on international politics, participation in society, dignified treatment of people, third world, colonialism, refugees.</p>
<p>SW FINAL YEAR STUDENTS ENGLAND</p> <p>37 valid answers</p>	<p>SW FINAL YEAR STUDENTS SPAIN</p> <p>64 valid answers</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Migrations (n=8)</li> <li>2. War (n=7)</li> <li>3. Discrimination (general, racism, sexism) (n=6)</li> <li>4. Violence against women (FGM, sexual violence) (n=5)</li> <li>5. Human trafficking/slavery (n=5)</li> <li>6. Cultural differences (n=5)</li> <li>7. Poverty (n=4)</li> <li>8. Asylum seekers/refugees (n=4)</li> <li>9. Politics, governments (n=4)</li> <li>10. Globalisation (n=3)</li> <li>11. Welfare rights (n=3)</li> <li>12. Exploitation/ employment rights (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): inequality, awareness of international standards, finance and knowledge, getting the balance right, environmental issues, natural disasters, international law, social work to join the struggles, social workers' awareness of international issues.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (In)equality (n=16)</li> <li>2. Migrations/borders (n=11)</li> <li>3. Effective application of universal HR (n=9)</li> <li>4. Exploitation (n=7)</li> <li>5. Poverty (n=6)</li> <li>6. Human trafficking (n=6)</li> <li>7. Discrimination (racism, sexism) (n=6)</li> <li>8. War (n=5)</li> <li>9. Politics/ governments/ authoritarian regimes (n=5)</li> <li>10. Dignity of all (n=3)</li> <li>11. Welfare rights (n=3)</li> <li>12. Cultural awareness/integration (n=2)</li> <li>13. Globalisation (n=2)</li> <li>14. Ethical commitment (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): international development, child abuse, prostitution, health, violent acts, lack of awareness of global issues.</p>

**TABLE 13 VIEWS ON RELEVANT ISSUES RE HR AND SJ NATIONAL CONTEXTS**

<p><i>What do you think are the most relevant issues for social work regarding human rights and social justice in the <b>context of the UK/ Spain?</b></i></p>	
<p>SW EDUCATORS ENGLAND</p> <p>37 valid answers</p>	<p>SW EDUCATORS SPAIN</p> <p>31 valid answers</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Poverty (n=12)</li> <li>2. Welfare rights/politics (n=12)</li> <li>3. Discrimination /diversity (general, racism, sexism, based on sexual orientation) (n=8)</li> <li>4. Inequality (n=4)</li> <li>5. Human trafficking/slavery (n=3)</li> <li>6. Asylum seekers/refugees (n=3)</li> <li>7. HR legislation (n=3)</li> <li>8. Child abuse (n=2)</li> <li>9. Mental capacity (n=2)</li> <li>10. Violence against women (n=2)</li> <li>11. Standard practice in social work (n=2)</li> <li>12. Social exclusion (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): migration, cultural differences, Islamophobia, people living with complex conditions, access to advocacy, service user involvement, radical practice, housing, privacy, family life, fair trial, promoting good relations, transient communities, employers' practices, domestic abuse, unemployment, older people support needs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inequality (n=8)</li> <li>2. Immigration (n=7)</li> <li>3. Social exclusion (n=6)</li> <li>4. (Crisis) of welfare/ austerity (n=6)</li> <li>5. Impoverishment of the population (n=5)</li> <li>6. Rights of children and vulnerable adults (n=4)</li> <li>7. Public system of social services (n=3)</li> <li>8. Housing (n=3)</li> <li>9. (Un)employment (n=3)</li> <li>10. violence against women (n=2)</li> <li>11. Discrimination (gender, race) (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): freedom of speech, neoliberalism, education, social needs, sexual exploitation, dignified treatment of people.</p>
<p>SW FINAL YEAR STUDENTS ENGLAND</p> <p>40 valid answers</p>	<p>SW FINAL YEAR STUDENTS SPAIN</p> <p>65 valid answers</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Welfare system/ austerity (n=9)</li> <li>2. (In)equality (n=7)</li> <li>3. Workplace conditions (bureaucracy, budgets, resources, CPD, stress) (n=6)</li> <li>4. Counter discourses (victimisation of service users, marginalisation of HR&amp;SJ) (n=5)</li> <li>5. Child protection (n=4)</li> <li>6. Mental health (n=4)</li> <li>7. Discrimination (general, racism) (n=4)</li> <li>8. Poverty (n=3)</li> <li>9. Cultural differences (n=3)</li> <li>10. Human trafficking (n=2)</li> <li>11. Access to legal aid (n=2)</li> <li>12. Use of professional power (n=2)</li> <li>13. More knowledge and awareness (n=2)</li> <li>14. HR law (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): migration, asylum seekers, FGM, private lives and freedoms, rights of absent fathers, empowerment and protection.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (In)equality (n=24)</li> <li>2. Welfare rights (general)/ politics (n=15)</li> <li>3. (Un)employment (n=10)</li> <li>4. Housing (n=10)</li> <li>5. Migration/Borders (Melilla) (n=6)</li> <li>6. Social exclusion (n=6)</li> <li>7. Poverty (n=6)</li> <li>8. Discrimination (sexism, racism) (n=4)</li> <li>9. Violence against women (n=4)</li> <li>10. Legislation/justice (n=4)</li> <li>11. Education (n=4)</li> <li>12. Individualism, lack of solidarity (n=3)</li> <li>13. Healthcare (n=2)</li> <li>14. Bureaucracy in social work (n=2)</li> <li>15. The crisis (n=2)</li> <li>16. Effective HR (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): victimisation, dignity, abuse, ageing population, public security, childhood, torture, disability.</p>

## Commitment to causes explicitly related to human rights or social justice

The third question in this section of the survey asked respondents if they were committed to any particular causes explicitly related to human rights and/or social justice. If they responded yes, they were asked to specify their particular commitments. This was Q8 in the social work educators' surveys in England and Spain, Q10 in the social work student' survey in England and Q9 in the social work students' survey in Spain.

As next table shows, 62.9% of the social work educators in England and as many as 90 % of the social work educators in Spain responded yes to this question. About 40% of the social work final year students in the two countries did so.

**TABLE 14 SOCIAL WORK EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS' COMMITMENT TO HR OR SJ CAUSES, PERCENTAGES**

<b>8. Are you committed to any particular causes explicitly related to human rights and/or social justice? (For example, are you a member or do you support an organisation that focuses on human rights or social justice, do you work/ have you worked in the human rights field, related activist activities, etc.)</b>								
	n= 41		n=56		n=35		n=92	
	Educators England		Students England		Educators Spain		Students Spain	
Answer	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No:	13	37.1%	32	59.3%	3	10.0%	54	60.7%
Yes:	22	62.9%	22	40.7%	27	90.0%	35	39.3%
Total	35	100%	54	100%	30	100%	89	100%
No response	6		2		5		3	

The following table offers an overview of the kinds of commitments mentioned by the respondents. The majority of the social work educators in England and of the educators and students in Spain who asserted to be committed to causes explicitly related to human rights and/or social justice indicated they were members or supported organisations which promoted human rights or social justice (n=15/26, n=22/30, n=18/36, respectively). However, a majority of the final year students in England referred to their work or placement experiences in a human rights field (n=9/21). In a second place, social work educators in England and Spain referred to

their work or research experience in a human rights field (n=5/26, n=4/30), while the social work students referred to related volunteering (n=5/21 of the students in England, 15/36 of the students in Spain). The remaining respondents from the four surveyed groups referred to other commitments such as campaigning/activism, political activity or engagement with professional networks.

**TABLE 15 SOCIAL WORK EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS' COMMITMENT TO HR OR SJ CAUSES, OPEN ANSWERS**

<i>Are you committed to any particular causes explicitly related to human rights and/or social justice? If yes, please specify.</i>	
SW EDUCATORS ENGLAND 26 valid responses	SW EDUCATORS SPAIN 30 valid responses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Membership/support of organisations that support HR/SJ (n=15)</li> <li>2. Work/research experience in HR field (n=5)</li> <li>3. Social work education with a focus on HR/SJ (n=3)</li> <li>4. Professional networks (n=3) (SWAN)</li> <li>5. Campaigning (n=2)</li> <li>6. Trade Unions (n=2)</li> <li>7. Political activity (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): 'Anti-Apartheid Movement (during 1970s/1980s)', non-specified commitments related to: 'asylum seekers', 'welfare rights', 'legal aid reductions', 'criminalisation of homelessness people in a number of countries', 'rights of people with mental health problems' (...).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Membership/support of organisations that support HR/SJ (n=22)</li> <li>2. Work/research experience in HR field (n=4)</li> <li>3. Campaigning/ activism (n=2)</li> <li>4. Professional networks (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): non-specified commitments related to: 'violence against women', 'fighting social exclusion', 'child abuse', 'homeless people, immigration, IHV', 'environment and women'.</p>
SW FINAL YEAR STUDENTS ENGLAND 21 valid responses	SW FINAL YEAR STUDENTS SPAIN 36 valid responses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work/placement experience in HR field (n=9)</li> <li>2. Volunteering (n=5)</li> <li>3. Membership/support of organisations that support HR/SJ (n=4)</li> <li>4. Campaigning/ activism (n=4)</li> <li>5. Trade Unions (n=2)</li> <li>6. Professional networks (n=2) (SWAN)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Membership/support of organisations that support HR/SJ (n=18)</li> <li>2. Volunteering (n=15)</li> <li>3. Campaigning/ activism (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): course work on human rights</p>

### 3. Experiences and views about teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in social work education

This section will present the responses of social work educators and final year students to a series of questions about their experiences and views in relation to teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in a social work course.

#### Teaching methods, legal frameworks, theories and teaching resources and materials

*Social work educators* were asked whether their teaching subjects were related to human rights or social justice. 94 % of the social work educators in England and 75% of social work educators in Spain answered “yes”. Those who answered “yes” were directed to a series of questions regarding the 1) teaching methods, 2) legislation and legal frameworks, 3) theoretical frameworks, and 4) teaching methods they used in their teaching. Their answers were the following:

- *Teaching methods*

Social work educators in England and Spain mentioned similarly varied teaching methods which included in both countries: lectures, group work, involvement of service users and professionals, visual media (one educator in Spain mentioned using a “videoclub”), workshops/seminars, case studies, fieldwork activities, practice examples, promoting discussion, promoting reflection, distance /interactive online materials, and student presentations. Social work educators often noted the benefits of combining different teaching methods.

- *Legislation and legal frameworks*

Regarding legislation and legal frameworks used in their teaching, social work educators in England referred in order of frequency to: The Human Rights Act 1998, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the European Convention on Human Rights, Equality legislation, children’s legislation, mental health legislation, health and social care legislation and the UNDHR.

The UNDHR was however highlighted as a fundamental legal instrument used in human rights and social justice teaching by most social work educators in Spain, who also referred frequently to the profession's ethics codes, the Spanish Constitution of 1978, international human rights treaties, and to national and regional legislation and policies on urban planning, social services, social inclusion, volunteering, equality, dependency and international cooperation.

- [Theoretical frameworks](#)

In relation to the theoretical frameworks referred to by the social work educators in England, these were extremely varied, and basically included: Marxist, anarchist and feminist theories, political economy, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory theory, Foucault, life course and person centred theories, social work values, social model of disability and theoretical approaches to children's participation.

The theoretical frameworks mentioned by the social work educators in Spain were highly varied too, similarly ranging from Marxist to structuralist approaches to social work, and including as well social work values frameworks. In addition, social work educators in Spain mentioned theoretical frameworks related to action research, social movements, citizen participation, humanism and human capabilities approaches.

- [Teaching materials and resources](#)

Specific teaching materials and resources mentioned by social work educators in England and Spain included books, articles, internet links, videos, and laws databases. Social work educators in England also mentioned case law and media case reports, whereas social work educators in Spain mentioned a broader use of newspapers, and using benefits application forms.

*Social work students* were asked if, during their training as social workers, they had been explicitly taught about human rights and/ or social justice issues and perspectives in social work. 91% (n=41) of students in England answered "yes" and 9% (n=4) "no". 76% (n=58) of students in Spain answered "yes" and 24% (n=18) "no". Those who asserted they had been explicitly taught about these were asked to identify some of the teaching methods that had been used. These were largely aligned with those mentioned by social work educators, although students in both countries tended to name specific modules, exams and assignments more often than the educators.



## Views on best ways (social work educators) / helpful learning experiences (students) in teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in social work education.

Social work educators in England and Spain were asked what, in their view, are the best ways of teaching social work students about human rights and social justice. In turn, the final year students in England and Spain were asked to give examples of helpful experiences in learning about human rights and/or social justice during their social work training. Their coded responses are presented in the following table.

**TABLE 16 VIEWS ON BEST WAYS OF TEACHING/LEARNING ABOUT HR AND SJ**

<i>In your view, what are the best ways of teaching social work students about human rights and social justice?</i>	
SW EDUCATORS ENGLAND 32 valid responses	SW EDUCATORS SPAIN 20 valid responses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Linking theory and practice (n=15)</li> <li>2. Promoting discussion and challenging views (n=8)</li> <li>3. Case studies (n=8)</li> <li>4. Fieldwork experiences (n=5)</li> <li>5. Group work (n=5)</li> <li>6. Promoting critical self- reflection (n=4)</li> <li>7. Awareness raising (n=4)</li> <li>8. Mixed teaching methods (n=4)</li> <li>9. Involvement of service users / life experiences</li> <li>10. Considering history, ideology and politics (n=3)</li> <li>11. Interactive learning (n=3)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=2): Films/ documentaries, incorporation of HR and SJ in every teaching area. Other (n=1): working across professional boundaries, critique and reflection on legislation, problem based learning, promoting awareness of students' own rights, dependent on the student group, dependent on what you are teaching, using a professional in delivery, engaging student feedback.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Practice/ fieldwork experience (n=5)</li> <li>2. Case studies (n=5)</li> <li>3. Audiovisual materials (n=3)</li> <li>4. Discussing real life stories, real stories from the news (n=3)</li> <li>5. Promoting discussion/ debates (n=2)</li> <li>6. Integration of HR and SJ concepts across the course (n=2)</li> <li>7. Practical activities (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): promoting reflection on experience, promoting reflection on ethical dilemmas, involvement of HR organisations, addressing HR implicitly, being coherent role models for students, promoting students' social activism, introducing students to activities outside the university which promote SJ and HR (e.g. Social theatre, NGO's, activist groups, professional networks).</p>
<i>Please give examples of helpful experiences in learning about human rights and/or social justice during your training as a social worker</i>	
SW FINAL YEAR STUDENTS ENGLAND 34 valid responses	SW FINAL YEAR STUDENTS SPAIN 48 valid responses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Practice/ fieldwork experiences (inking these with assignments, theory, facing ethical dilemmas, etc.) (n=13)</li> <li>2. Lectures (n=7)</li> <li>3. Specific modules (n=4)</li> <li>4. Individual assignments/ practical activities (n=4)</li> <li>5. Addressing controversial topics (n=3)</li> <li>6. Involvement of practitioners/ practice examples (n=3)</li> <li>7. Service users' perspectives (n=2)</li> <li>8. Critical (self-/ ) reflection (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): Case studies, group presentation, thinking through the history of HR, experiencing the challenges as a student, advocacy for service users, incorporation of HR into theories and methods, learning about HR and SJ throughout the programme, youtube videos.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Individual assignments/ practical activities (n=12)</li> <li>2. Case studies (n=9)</li> <li>3. Group work (n=6)</li> <li>4. Courses/ talks on specific topics (n=4)</li> <li>5. Practice/fieldwork experiences (n=4)</li> <li>6. Lectures (n=4)</li> <li>7. Relevant readings (n=4)</li> <li>8. Films/ documentaries (n=4)</li> <li>9. Study/ analysis of legislation (n=3)</li> <li>10. Practice examples from practitioners or teachers (n=3)</li> <li>11. Addressing controversial topics (n=2)</li> <li>12. Volunteering/participation in social movements outside the university (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): service users' experiences, debates, quality management. <u>Note</u>: two students pointed out they only had superficial learning experiences, through readings and theoretical teaching.</p>

Both the social work educators and final year students in England referred in the first place to the key importance of students' placements and fieldwork experiences. Both highlighted the students' placements as a privileged space for students to establish links between theory and practice and to explore ethical dilemmas. But the social work educators as well as the final year students in England also identified helpful ways of teaching and learning about human rights and social justice which can be achieved in the classroom. Several social work educators highlighted the usefulness of case studies (n=8/32) and of promoting discussion and challenging views (n=8/32), whilst various social work students in England identified lectures (n=7/34), specific modules (n=4) and individual assignments or practical activities (n=4/32) as helpful learning experiences.

Various social work educators in Spain (n=5/20) also identified placements and fieldwork experiences as key spaces for students to learn about human rights and social justice. They also highlighted the benefits of using case studies (n=5) and audiovisual materials and of discussing real life stories (such as stories from the news) (n=3 each). The social work students in Spain, however, did not seem to place practice and fieldwork experiences in a particularly relevant position, as these were only mentioned by four out of the 48 valid responses. The helpful learning experiences mentioned by social work students in Spain ranged from individual assignments/ practical activities (n=12/48), case studies (n=9), group work (n=6), courses and talks on specific related topics (n=4), lectures (n=4), relevant readings (n=4) or films/ documentaries (n=4). Two students in Spain pointed out they had only had superficial learning experiences, through readings and theoretical teaching.

### Difficulties in teaching and learning about human rights and /or social justice. And what could improve this?

The surveys asked social work educators and final year students whether they had faced any difficulties in relation to their teaching or learning about human rights and social justice in social work education. They were also asked for their views on what could improve learning and teaching in these areas.

43% of the social work educators in England and 26% of the social work educators in Spain indicated they had faced difficulties in their teaching about human rights and/ or social justice. Slightly under a 30% of social work students in England and Spain indicated this. There was some none response amongst all groups.

**TABLE 17 DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT HR AND SJ, PERCENTAGES**

Have you faced any difficulties in relation to your teaching about human rights and/or social justice during your career as a social work educator?				
	n= 41		n=35	
	Educators England		Educators Spain	
Answer	Count	%	Count	%
No:	18	56.2%	19	73.1%
Yes:	14	43.8%	7	26.9%
<i>Total</i>	32	100%	26	100%
<i>No response</i>	9		9	

Have you faced any difficulties in relation to your learning about human rights and/or social justice during your training as a social worker?				
	n= 56		n=92	
	Students England		Students Spain	
Answer	Count	%	Count	%
No:	28	71.8%	47	73.1%
Yes:	11	28.2%	14	26.9%
<i>Total</i>	39	100%	61	100%
<i>No response</i>	17		31	

The areas of difficulty noted by 17<sup>5</sup> social work educators in England related to a perceived marginalization of these subjects, students finding these perspectives challenging in different ways (complicated, emotionally challenging, etc.), time or curriculum space constraints, students limited alignment with these principles, difficulties in relation to the place of these values in practice settings, and difficulties related with teaching delivery. Only 7 educators from Spain asserted to have faced any difficulties in relation to their teaching of human right and social justice, indicating some resistance from students (intellectual, ideological or emotional), and limitations related to the teaching contexts, time constraints and coordination for the course planning. Interestingly, one social work educator expressed they had “not found any barriers or resistances to the incorporation of human rights and social justice into [their] teaching, and did not expect anyone daring to pose these”.

In the case of the final year students in England, these mentioned an insufficient teaching in these areas, difficulties in learning about human rights law and others such as finding a balance between statutory responsibilities and welfare, or insufficient support with learning difficulties. Final year students in Spain noted quite consistently difficulties related to an insufficient or inadequate teaching in these areas, and to a theoretical and abstract teaching.

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<sup>5</sup> Although only 14 social work educators in England indicated they had face difficulties in their teaching on human rights and/ or social justice, 3 of those who did not respond to the question or responded “no”, did comment on these areas in the open part of the question.

**TABLE 18 DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT HR AND SJ, OPEN ANSWERS**

<i>Have you faced any difficulties in relation to your teaching about human rights and/or social justice during your career as a social work educator? If yes, please specify.</i>	
<p>SW EDUCATORS ENGLAND</p> <p>17 valid responses</p>	<p>SW EDUCATORS SPAIN</p> <p>7 valid responses</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Marginalisation of the subjects (n=6)</li> <li>2. Students find these perspectives challenging (personally challenging or complicated) (n=5)</li> <li>3. Time constraints/ packed curriculum (n=4)</li> <li>4. Students orientation towards employability vs principles (n=3)</li> <li>5. Difficulties in practice settings (n=2)</li> <li>6. Methods/ teaching delivery (n=2)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Resistance from students (emotional, intellectual, ideological) (n=3)</li> <li>2. Teaching context (number of students, resources) (n=2)</li> <li>3. Time constraints (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): lack of coordination for the integration in the programme curriculum planning.</p>
<i>Have you faced any difficulties in relation to your learning about human rights and/or social justice during your training as a social worker? If yes, please specify.</i>	
<p>SW FINAL YEAR STUDENTS ENGLAND</p> <p>10 valid responses</p>	<p>SW FINAL YEAR STUDENTS SPAIN</p> <p>18 valid responses</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Insufficient teaching on HR/SJ (n=3)</li> <li>2. Difficulty in learning about HR law (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): Balance between statutory responsibilities and welfare, insufficient support for professionals and service users, some of the ideas taught about HR and SJ felt oppressive, students' unwillingness to engage in honest discussion, support with learning difficulties.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Insufficient/ inadequate teaching on HR/SJ (n=8)</li> <li>2. Theoretical/abstract teaching (n=9)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): local authorities.</p>

## What could improve teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in social work education?

When asked for their views about what could improve teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in social work education, social work educators and students pointed to the areas summarised in the next page table. As shown in the table, suggestions from social work educators in England included a greater integration and focus, and more space in the curriculum in relation to these areas in social work training, engaging with professional networks, a greater alignment of social work agencies with human rights and social justice principles, more links with complexities of practice, or challenging the narrow conceptualisation of social work in the UK. Social work educators in Spain pointed to suggestions including a greater integration and focus in social work training, more involvement and contact of students with “social realities”, more links theory-practice, and training for in these areas for social work educators.

Final year students in England also suggested a greater focus and integration of these areas of learning, as well as more practice examples and links with social work practice, more space for debate and discussion or a broader examination of political, historical and social contexts. Final year students in Spain suggested along similar lines greater focus and integration, more practice examples and links with practice. They also pointed to aspects such as students gaining more experience of the realities of service users, an alignment of social work agencies with these values, the expertise of social work educators or more interaction between educators and students.

**TABLE 19 WHAT COULD IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT HR AND SJ?**

<i>What do you think could improve social work students' learning about human rights and/or social justice in social work?</i>	
SW EDUCATORS ENGLAND 29 valid responses	SW EDUCATORS SPAIN 24 valid responses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Greater integration into social work training (n=8)</li> <li>2. Greater focus/commitment (n=6)</li> <li>3. More space in the curriculum (n=3)</li> <li>4. Professional networks (n=3)</li> <li>5. Alignment of social work agencies with HR/SJ (n=3)</li> <li>6. More links with the complexities of practice "on the ground" (n=3)</li> <li>7. Challenge the narrow conceptualization of social work in the UK (n=3)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): more open atmosphere around politics, build in to assessment, more space for debate and discussion, comparative studies and case studies, greater teaching by experts, less LA interference- more academic freedom, more emphasis in SOPs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Greater integration into social work training (n=7)</li> <li>2. Specific module or training events (n=5)</li> <li>3. Students' involvement and contact with related social realities (n=4)</li> <li>4. Better coordination amongst educators (n=2)</li> <li>5. Greater focus in the curriculum (n=2)</li> <li>6. Greater links theory-practice (n=2)</li> <li>7. Training for social work educators (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): emotional involvement of educators, anything that would raise students' awareness and commitment, the promotion of collective values rather than individualism and competitiveness at universities, students' experience of related activism.</p>
SW FINAL YEAR STUDENTS ENGLAND 32 valid responses	SW FINAL YEAR STUDENTS SPAIN 51 valid responses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Greater focus (n=8)</li> <li>2. Practice examples (case studies, real life examples) (n=7)</li> <li>3. More support to link with social work practice (academic educators, practice educators, peers) (n=6)</li> <li>4. More space for debate and discussion (n=5)</li> <li>5. Greater integration into social work training (n=4)</li> <li>6. Broader examination of political, historical and social contexts (n=3)</li> <li>7. More/ better placements and practice experiences (n=3)</li> <li>8. Service users' perspectives (n=2)</li> <li>9. Expertise of social work educators (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1) = "better training, resources and services", modules on gender and feminist perspectives, free conference attendance to high profile events for student committee and reps.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Greater focus/ commitment (n=13)</li> <li>2. Specific module or training events (n=11)</li> <li>3. Greater links theory- practice, practice examples (n=11)</li> <li>4. Greater integration into social work training (n=5)</li> <li>5. Students' experience of/involvement with the realities of social work service users (n=5)</li> <li>6. More practice experiences (n=4)</li> <li>7. Alignment of social work agencies with HR and SJ (n=2)</li> <li>8. Expertise of social work educators (n=2)</li> <li>9. Use of audiovisual and IT resources (n=2)</li> </ol> <p>Other (n=1): Knowledge of principles and laws, related research projects, learning techniques for social mobilization, more interaction educators-students.</p>



## Views on the extent to which human rights and social justice are integrated in social work programmes

The following tables show the views of social work educators and students in England and Spain in relation to the extent to which human rights and social justice are integrated in their social work training programmes.

Around 25% of the social work educators in England expressed these were not integrated at all or not very integrated whereas this percentage was 12% in relation to the social work educators in Spain (none expressing these were not integrated at all). Around 30% of the educators in both countries asserted these were moderately integrated. The remaining 45% of the social work educators in England and 60% of the educators in Spain thought these were quite or very integrated.

Conversely, social work students in England evaluated more highly than those in Spain the extent to which human rights and social justice were integrated across their training. Around 10% of the students in England and 18% of the students in Spain gave the answer that these were not integrated at all or not very integrated. 27% of social work students in England and 45% of students in Spain asserted these were moderately integrated. And over a 60% of the students in England against about a 36% of social work students in Spain indicated human rights and social justice were quite or very integrated in their social work courses.

**TABLE 20 TO WHAT EXTENT ARE HR AND SJ INTEGRATED IN SOCIAL WORK COURSES**

To what extent are themes of human rights and social justice integrated across the social work training courses at your institution?				
	n= 41		n=35	
	Educators England		Educators Spain	
Answer	Count	%	Count	%
Not integrated at all	3	8.1%	0	0.0%
Not very integrated	6	16.3%	4	12.5%
Moderately integrated	11	29.7%	9	28.1%
Quite integrated	14	37.8%	12	37.5%
Very integrated	3	8.1%	7	21.9%
<i>Total</i>	37	100%	32	100%
<i>No response</i>	4		3	

To what extent are themes of human rights and social justice integrated across your social work training?				
	n= 56		n=92	
	Students England		Students Spain	
Answer	Count	%	Count	%
Not integrated at all	1	2.1%	1	1.3%
Not very integrated	4	8.3%	13	16.9%
Moderately integrated	13	27.1%	35	45.5%
Quite integrated	22	45.8%	27	35%
Very integrated	8	16.7%	1	1.3%
<i>Total</i>	48	100%	77	100%
<i>No response</i>	8		15	

## Views on whether social work programmes prepare students to incorporate human rights and social justice into social work practice

Social work educators and final year students from both countries were asked in their surveys whether they believed their social work programmes prepared social work students to incorporate in their social work practice a) human rights perspectives, and b) social justice perspectives.

As the table in next page shows, around 70% of the social work educators and students in England agreed or strongly agreed that their social work programmes prepared students to incorporate human rights perspectives into their practice. This view was held by 65% of the educators and only a 37% of the students in Spain.

In relation to educators and students' agreement with the statement that their social work programmes prepare students to incorporate social justice perspectives into their practice, their levels of agreement were slightly higher amongst the groups except for the social work educators in Spain, but followed a generally similar patterns. Around 80% of the social work educators and students in England agreed or strongly agreed with this, whereas this was the case of around a 60% of the social work educators and 45% of the students in Spain.

**TABLE 21 THE SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMME PREPARES STUDENTS TO INCORPORATE HR AND SJ TO PRACTICE**

The social work programme at my institution prepares social work students to incorporate "human rights" perspectives into their practice								
	n= 41		n=56		n=35		n=92	
	Educators England		Students England		Educators Spain		Students Spain	
Answer	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Strongly Disagree	0	0,0%	3	5,5%	0	0,0%	6	6,6%
Disagree	3	7,3%	4	7,3%	4	11,7%	19	20,9%
Undecided	10	24,4%	8	14,5%	11	32,4%	32	35,1%
Agree	21	51,2%	29	52,7%	14	41,2%	29	31,9%
Strongly Agree	7	17,1%	11	20,0%	5	14,7%	5	5,5%
<i>Total</i>	41	100%	55	100%	34	100%	91	100%
<i>No response</i>	0		1		1		1	
The social work programme at my institution prepares social work students to incorporate "social justice" perspectives into their practice								
	n= 41		n=56		n=35		n=92	
	Educators England		Students England		Educators Spain		Students Spain	
Answer	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Strongly Disagree	1	2,6%	3	5,3%	0	0,0%	2	2,2%
Disagree	4	10,3%	5	8,9%	4	11,7%	14	15,6%
Undecided	2	5,1%	3	5,4%	9	26,5%	33	36,7%
Agree	27	69,2%	31	55,4%	17	50,0%	37	41,1%
Strongly Agree	5	12,8%	14	25,0%	4	11,8%	4	4,4%
<i>Total</i>	39	100%	56	100%	34	100%	90	100%
<i>No response</i>	2		0		1		2	

#### 4. Questions for students about how human rights and social justice principles are performed in their social work courses.

A final set of questions, addressed to social work students only, sought to explore through close questions general patterns in relation to a series of principles which can be considered to underlie the understanding of a human rights and social justice based social work education by international social work organisations (Sewpaul and Jones, 2005; IASSW and IFSW, 2004; IFSW-Europe, 2012)). In particular, these questions focused on the role of social work educators in performing and modelling social work ethics, students' preparation for critical reflection and addressing ethical dilemmas, student choice and control over their learning, personalised support to students, non-discrimination and inclusiveness (cultural, ethnic and gender) in academic contexts, and service user involvement in social work education. A final question asked for general satisfaction of students with their social work course. These questions were intended to assist my holistic thematic interpretation of findings. The comparative responses to these questions of students in the two countries can be consulted in annex 1 for a visual overview, but these are not developed further as this would exceed the scope of this research.

## Part 2: Qualitative interviews with social work educators in England and Spain

In this section of the chapter I offer a summary of the analysis of the qualitative interviews. I firstly offer an introduction to the contexts of the interviews in England and Spain, and then I present summaries of the views expressed by each interviewee as well as a discussion of main ideas and patterns found across the interviews from each country

### 1. Contexts of the interviews

The interviewees in England consisted of the person acting as a gatekeeper of the social work department of the selected University, and two members of the department's teaching staff. The three of them taught in the Undergraduate Social work degree, which was the focus of the study for comparison with Spain where social work qualification is only achieved through an undergraduate University degree.

I had had the opportunity to meet this gatekeeper and one of the interviewed social work educators in an event that had taken place after the gatekeeper's agreement for their BSc programme to participate in my research. The gatekeeper introduced me to the member of staff and the three of us had an informal conversation about my research, where this member of staff asserted they would be very happy to be interviewed. Sometime later I contacted through email all potential participants in the research interviews, which had been identified with the help of the gatekeeper to invite them to take part in these. Together with the email letter, I provided a project description, a poster on the research design and the interview plan (see annex 3). The gatekeeper, the member of staff I had met before, and another member of staff offered to participate in interviews. I carried out the arrangements to interview them at their convenience. The three of them showed to be supportive of the research and willing to help, and communications for arranging interviews as well as the interviews themselves were carried out in what I perceived as a relaxed, comfortable, and friendly atmosphere. The interview with the gatekeeper took place in a break of another event where we met again, and the interviews with the other two educators were carried out on one day, at their University. On that day, the gatekeeper introduced me to the educator I had not personally met before and I had an informal

chat with this person as we looked for an appropriate place for the interview and before starting this. Hence, I had had an opportunity to build some level of trust and rapport with each of the interviewees.

In Spain, I followed a similar protocol in relation to firstly meeting the gatekeeper to discuss interview arrangements and then contacting the members of teaching staff they had helped me identify with an email containing information on the research and the interview schedule. With the gatekeeper included, four social work educators volunteered to take part in the interviews. Three of these interviews were carried out on one day at the University, in the educators' rooms. And a fourth one (a few days later) at another workplace location more convenient for the other person who was engaged with work commitments external to the University at that time period. These people also expressed their interest and support for the research, and we had a brief friendly chat time before the interviews. But in the case of the social work educators other than the gatekeeper, not having met them before, our communications were rather more formal than those with the educators in England. So although I felt comfortable during the interviews, especially as we were speaking in Spanish (my mother tongue), I think the environment and rapport during the interviews were positive but definitely more formal and distant than in the case of interviews in England.

Interestingly, and not necessarily being a bad thing, I perceived that in both countries, I was perceived as an outsider in some way. Educators from both countries tried to explain to me and give me background information on "how things are in each of the countries" and politely asked if I was aware of recent developments or news related with social work education or the broader society in each country.

In relation to power dynamics, I am aware that I was perceived as a student who was requesting help for my research, towards which the volunteering interviewees were empathetic and willing to help. Being a student interviewing educators arguably put me in a less powerful position than them. However, my role in leading the arrangements and interview process, the gatekeepers "endorsement" and promotion of my research amongst the staff, and perhaps a degree of prestige of my research might have contributed to redress this imbalance to some extent. This prestige might have related in England to the research being conducted and funded from a prestigious University, and in Spain it may have linked to the fact of this being doctoral social work research which in Spain is not very common yet, and conducted from the UK (involving this at least that I was succeeding in studying in a second language and in a country which is tends to be seen from Spain as academically strong)

## 2. Summary of interviewees' views

Note that names are pseudonyms.

### Interviews in Spain

Interviewee 1 -Spain
<p>Clara, 16 years teaching in a social work course</p> <p><b><u>Relationship between human rights, social justice and social work:</u></b> There is a fundamental relationship between these three concepts. HR and SJ are the roots of the profession, which is intrinsically bound to these. The rationale for a human rights and social justice based social work education is based on three legitimate sources: A) IFSW's guidance, B) The Spanish Constitution and Spanish Welfare state structure C) Social work codes of ethics.</p> <p>Social workers are responsible to defend HR and SJ. The profession should be the "banner" of these. Social workers should be personally (and therefore professionally) committed to these principles. Social workers need to "transcend" individual commitment to HR and SJ and take collective, "social responsibility" (as explained by the IFSW) for these; they need to increase their understanding of HR and SJ through individual, group and community social work.</p> <p><b><u>Teaching HR and SJ:</u></b> She teaches mainly through lectures about the history of HR and the welfare state, and about social work ethics. She finds useful using videos and pieces of history documentaries during her lectures.</p> <p><b><u>Social work students:</u></b> The majority are quite young and were born in democracy times. Taking for granted rights in Spain, they bring a narrow or biased understanding of HR which they associate with 1<sup>st</sup> generation rights and organisations such as Amnesty International. But they gradually understand that HR are more global or holistic. At that point HR and SJ ideas become sources of knowledge and understanding in relation to matters such as education, participation, self-determination, etc.</p> <p>In relation to HR and SJ topics, students are a "willing audience", there are no resistances on their part. It would be unthinkable to find social work students against these perspectives. Practice placements are a place where students "see" the links between these principles and social work practice</p> <p><b><u>Historical moment in Spain:</u></b> Taken for granted rights are being challenged. Austerity is leading to the violation of rights, especially 2<sup>nd</sup> generation rights, and putting social work "under siege" given the lack of resources (benefits, services, professionals, central planning, etc.)</p> <p><b><u>This University</u></b> strongly supports HR and SJ principles, no obstacles to teaching about these.</p>



## Interviewee 2 -Spain

Laura, 15 years teaching in a social work course

**Relationship between human rights, social justice and social work:** Social work should be “THE” profession orientated to the promotion of HR and SJ (while also helping individuals), as promoted by the IFSW. Social workers have a great responsibility in this regard.

The structural dimension of social work involves denouncing injustice. Social workers should “earn” a more visible and relevant place in political and public debates, to which they should contribute drawing from the profession’s global perspectives. Social work needs to contribute to new models of citizenship to fit current contexts. Social workers must also have a say in developing social cohesion, building sustainability from the “micro” level upwards to sustain social justice.

HR and SJ need to be incorporated in social work course courses because being able to uphold these values is part of the professional profile. Social workers should be personally (and therefore professionally) committed to these principles.

**Social work students** come to the social work course with two motivations 1) help people 2) help to make a more just society, with better living conditions. Hence, they are very receptive to HR and SJ topics.

**Teaching HR and SJ:** research area of teaching, with a focus on action and participatory research to develop sustainable programmes with an impact at “macro levels” of organisations or communities. Review of action research projects mainly from Latin America, but also from some research experiences in Spain. When teaching statistics tries to use secondary data related to inequality, social justice and human rights issues.

**The social work programme:** Offers intensive and closely supervised practice learning experiences. They have carried out a very powerful learning experience of teaching innovation – “Immersion experiences” where students live for a short period of time within disadvantaged communities, getting in direct contact with the people and also the professionals working in these communities.

No barriers to HR or SJ teaching from the University, which actively promotes these values.

### Interviewee 3 -Spain

Javier, 3 years teaching a module in a social work course

**Relationship between human rights, social justice and social work:** HR and SJ are key areas of social work. Social work teachers have “a lot of emphasis to put on this” for students to understand, discuss, and work around these. Discusses how HR are applied in social workers’ international cooperation roles through ethics codes and protocols.

**Teaching HR and SJ:** Effective teaching practices are for the discussion of world news, encouraging students to discuss these topics in their personal spheres, using videos, involving professionals, organising day trips or visits (e.g. radio station or public administration buildings – to demystify these). His teaching areas include the history of international cooperation.

**Social work students** do not seem to be very aware of international cooperation HR and SJ issues at the beginning of the module, but they show an increasing engagement with the topic. Social work students have a commitment and “vocation” to help others and promote justice when deciding to study social work in the first place. Students are looking forward to change attitudes, starting locally but wanting to “transcend” the local level and have an influence in change at a more global level. They show concerns about international conflicts.

**Historical moment in Spain:** there are important problems in accessing welfare services given the cuts.

**Social work programme:** experiences total freedom in teaching (within the topic, programme structure, etc.), there is a trust in teachers.

#### Interviewee 4 -Spain

Rosa, 18 years teaching in a social work course

**Relationship between human rights, social justice and social work:** HR and SJ are essential in social work. "Social work is deeply linked with the struggle for justice which is a struggle for HR". Social work should be person centred and empowering – seeking the recognition of rights. Social workers should be "THE" professionals to reclaim these rights for the people we work with. Social workers feel the responsibility to tell people the truth about how their rights are "trampled on". The 15M is a social movement relevant to social work as it is promoting a reflection on HR and reclaiming these.

Service users deserve recognition from the state and society and minimums to survive and develop but they are often victimised, including by social workers (who often make judgements about deserving/non deserving service users). In society and within the profession, the focus is on resources available rather than on people's needs.

There are rather "perverse messages" from society about what people need or deserve, that affect everyone including social workers. Capitalist society and unstoppable market interests lead to poverty and dehumanisation (reminding of the industrial revolution).

**Historical moment in Spain:** Currently the national context is very agitated; there are lots of shocking realities. There is a marked impoverishment and an increased vulnerability of the population. There is a loss of protection and of a "sense" of protection from "Daddy State".

Politicians are detached from society- do not represent people or consider social cost of economic measures- Social workers should reclaim this.

**Teaching HR and SJ: Teaches about the** origin and development of HR around the idea of citizenship. Current generations take for granted citizenship rights (which are inherent but need to be recognised). It is important to reflect on historical struggles to achieve rights. She highlights how HR are systematically violated- even in Spain

Teaches through lectures, incorporating audio-visual materials. Teaching includes exercises and links to videos and resources that show how HR are recognised in the Spanish Constitution. This year students were able to link these videos with realities in Spain (cuts in education, healthcare, tendency to privatisation, etc.)

**Social work students** are very receptive to anything that sounds related to justice; HR "stun" them more, as they tend to take these for granted initially "It may appear that there is no racism, sexism, or inequality until you help them see beyond the surface".

**This University** promotes the struggle for social justice and is supportive of teaching in these areas. There is academic freedom (in this University and in Spain in general).

## Discussion of interviews in Spain

The social work educators interviewed in Spain considered both human rights and social justice fundamental social work principles; the importance of these in the social work profession felt unquestionable to them. The rationale for such strong links between human rights, social justice and social work was based on the principles and rights established in the Spanish Constitution and the UNDHR, and also in relation to professional ethics. The educators from Spain showed awareness of guidelines and discourses from International Social work organisations such as the IFSW; they attributed these organisations most legitimacy in guiding the profession and linked their discourses with realities of social work in Spain. Their understanding of human rights and social justice (or at least their references to these concepts in the interviews) tended to be holistic and general. And they often expressed abstract views and abstract references to practice situations, without much detail: e. g. referring to “complicated situations in practice” but not specifying further.

All of them argued that social work as a profession and individual social workers have a very important responsibility to defend and promote human rights and social justice. A professional and personal commitment to the struggles in these areas is expected from social workers (and social work students) along the lines of virtue ethics. This responsibility of social workers towards human rights and social justice gains particular importance in relation to the current historical moment in Spain, characterised by socioeconomic crisis and widespread austerity. They unanimously denounced that in a context of austerity, many human rights are denied for an increasing number of people.

The educators from Spain made frequent references to history, such as making references to the dictatorship past in Spain and the subsequently started democratic period, or referring to the Industrial Revolution. Three of them mention the fact that they teach history as part of their modules' contents. Their teaching was based mainly on lectures complemented by experiential learning such as fieldtrips.

All the educators from this University in Spain asserted to have academic freedom, and not having encountered any significant barriers in relation to their teaching of human rights and social justice. They stated their University actively promotes social justice ideals.

### Interviewee 1 -England

Louise, first year of teaching in a social work course

**Relationship between human rights, social justice and social work:** “You can’t do social work without an understanding of HR and SJ, I think otherwise you endanger”.

Social work in England is at the moment a system to for fixing people to fit a capitalist society (people are forced to work, etc.). Social workers are expected to quickly fix families and move on. Social work practice is not in a good place to hold on social justice values. She expresses concerns about practice contexts, wondering if all the learning during the social work course is “undone” there.

**Historical moment in England:** there is widespread austerity, and far right thinking policies and rhetoric/public opinion boosted by the media. There is racism, sexism, and few jobs for the regular worker or young people but the blaming is on the individual. It is difficult for social workers “to fight this dialogue”. Privatisation is enabling people to earn money out of people’s desperate situations which is morally wrong.

**Social work students (Undergraduate programme):** There is a diversity of students; the department tries to make the course accessible to a diversity of students. Students seem curious and motivated to explore subjects, and get angry with the realisation of injustice. Students initially associate HR with countries overseas, but they become increasingly aware of what is also happening “down the street” (examples are oppressive policies such as bedroom tax, child poverty, etc.)

**Teaching:** takes place in small classes where people can speak. She uses videos, lot of talk about anti-oppressive practice, starting quite local exploring issues in the city and those that are relevant to students (such as fuel poverty which may affect older people in their families). When it starts “hitting home” then it becomes a much more global debate on the responsibilities of affluent countries to support other countries in a globalised world. Experiences abroad help students to open their eyes to diverse social realities.

**This University** and department: have a strong ethos around SJ.

## Interviewee 2 -England

Steve, 3 years teaching in a social work course

**Relationship between human rights, social justice and social work:** Prefers to focus on social justice, as the notion of HR tends to individualise whilst SJ is underpinned by a collective orientation. Personal strong political orientation since young age with SJ at the core. Started to work in social work related field because felt it was one way of realising the notion of social justice.

**Historical moment in England:** Neoliberal restructuring of welfare and the social work field are taking place. Current government attempts to reshape the terrain on which social work education operates- attempting to shape the knowledge base of the discipline and place political constraints. It is very important that departments of social work seek to integrate an idea of SJ.

It is difficult to translate at the moment critical and radical ideas to social work practice; neoliberal managerialism constrains the space for even relationship forms of practice, let alone radical practice. Political work and campaigning can give confidence in workplaces but also influence the practice field (maybe needs to be outside every day work) so activist networks are very useful and important.

He is aware from working and doing research with colleges in Europe that Neoliberal reconfiguration of social work is also taking place in mainland Europe. This is not as advanced as in the UK but nonetheless in a similar direction of travel.

**Teaching:** Covers critical thinkers and radical perspectives alongside mainstream perspectives, explaining “how professionalism is shaped”. Outside the classroom activities (such as SWAN groups) with students and service users are important as this allows the embodiment of a relationship different to the classic power dynamics between professionals and service users experienced in placements and workplace. Involvement of service users in teaching embodies SJ values. When sharing informal spaces with students, many interesting conversations happen, values and power sharing can be modelled.

**Social work students:** Their views change throughout the course. Highlights the transformative aspects of social work training.

**This University** and department: Social justice orientation, which does not think would be the norm in England.

### Interviewee 3 -England

John, more than 20 years teaching in disciplines related to social work

**Relationship between human rights, social justice and social work:** Believes in a social work for social justice. Some reasons are: the social roots of many social problems and his belief that marginalised sections of society deserve professionals that would “stand up” for them and be alongside them. The international definition of social work also highlights these values. He agrees more with a social justice focus linked with collective rights and aspirations than with a human rights focus (in a narrow sense- understands there is a broader view of HR) as sees these more linked with individualised rights.

Believes in a social work that works with individuals but thinks about the social conditions that create the problem. Social work is contested so it is good that students are subject to an array of opinions from social work educators.

**Historical moment in England:** There are clear effects of capitalism on individuals and the communities social workers work with, including growing inequality, poverty, environmental destruction, raising levels of racism, etc.

Globally but with UK forefront: there is an attempt to narrow social work professionalism. Discusses complexities around views on professionalism in the history of radical social work.

Outsourcing and privatisation of social work services is taking place. There is an “attack” on social work education.

**Teaching:** He wants students to think about continuities in policies and treatment of the poor, teaches history of social policy. “At the beginning, students probably don’t understand why on earth we are starting in 1834, they think that’s a bit strange what we are doing”.

Effective practices for teaching HR and SJ are experiential learning through field trips, conferences where they meet service users, and international placements which have a huge impact on students.

In relation to what would improve social work education regarding HR or SJ he points to: Less prescription, more freedom, more social science grounding of the curriculum. Teaching about international social work, learning about international experiences. Also room for areas such as “environmental social work”. In England, the focus is on qualifying people to work in the English framework and these broader but important areas are seen as “a luxury”.

**This University** and department: proclaim to be committed to a social work for social justice. Employers have said they like students from this programme because they are more critical and reflective. Students have mentioned that social work students from other courses they have met in placements do not recognise concepts such as “neoliberalism” or “privatisation”.

## Discussion of interviews in England

The interviewed social work educators in England, in contrast with those in Spain saw as contested the concepts of human rights and social justice, as well as the discourses from international social work organisations such as the IFSW. Their focus in relation to how human rights and social justice link with social work tend to be around the present contexts of social work in the country. They offer precise analyses of these contexts, with details and examples, and clear arguments and explanations in relation to the neoliberal mechanisms affecting service users and the profession itself.

The social work educators in England expressed great concerns about the current situation of the social work profession and social work education in England. They denounced the current government's drive to reshape social work and social work education along neoliberal lines- limiting the knowledge base, and trying to eliminate areas and values that are seen as "political" (notably social justice approaches). They highlight the attempts to move social work education out of Universities. They emphasised the enormous constraints in social work contexts of practice for engaging with social justice oriented social work, hence activism outside these contexts becomes very important.

In relation to the promotion of a more critical social work education engaged with human rights and social justice values within the classroom they noted the importance of aspects such as: facilitating safe spaces for discussion with students, making space to include teaching contents related to critical thinkers, deconstructing neoliberal discourses in teaching, or making links with history. They also highlight the importance of experiential learning outside the formal educational contexts through field trips and international placements, and of students, educators, and service users sharing spaces and power in forums outside the university.

They asserted their university and social work department openly promotes social justice values but note that this may not be the norm across HEIs in England. They tended to justify their alignment with social justice oriented models of social work drawing from their personal and political stands to a greater extent than from social work ethics.



## Conclusion

This first findings chapter has presented a synthesis of the research web survey data and interview data.

In the next chapter I draw together survey and qualitative interview data and interpret these in the light of the literature, in order to offer thematic answers to the research questions.

# CHAPTER 7: INTERPRETING THE RESEARCH DATA

## Introduction

This chapter is concerned with third and fourth stages of the critical realist model: 3) theoretical redescription (abduction) and retroduction; and 4) concretisation and contextualisation, and allows me to interpret the different sources of data as a whole, in the light of insights from the literature, to offer thematic explanations that address the three first research questions (the fourth research question will be addressed in the concluding chapter). This chapter is structured in three sections focusing respectively on 1) understandings of human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain, 2) the ideology and political agendas affecting social work education in England and Spain, and 3) teaching, learning and performing human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain. Each section offers theory informed explanations for the patterns found.

### 1. Understandings of human rights and social justice in social work and social work education in England and Spain.

This first section of the chapter addresses the first research question, which was: “What are the understandings of the role of human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain?”. I firstly discuss research findings in relation the understandings of the concepts of human rights and social justice by social work educators (and therefore conveyed to social work students) in England and Spain. Then I consider social work educators’ understandings of the relationship between human rights, social justice and social work.

## Understandings of the concepts of human rights and social justice

The following table summarises the differences found in the understandings of human rights and social justice concepts by social work educators in England and Spain.

**TABLE 22 UNDERSTANDINGS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ENGLAND AND SPAIN**

	UNDERSTANDINGS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATORS IN ENGLAND AND SPAIN	
	ENGLAND	SPAIN
HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	Two separate concepts and areas of knowledge	A continuum or separate but intrinsically linked concepts
HUMAN RIGHTS	Legalistic, responsibility of legal powers Individualistic	Holistic understanding including first, second and third generation human rights - individual and collective rights. Shared responsibility of governments, civil society, professions, etc.
SOCIAL JUSTICE	Arguably: contested views ranging from:  A narrow understanding of social justice “as helping those on the margins of society” CSJ (2015: 3) without considering structural dimensions of social problems.  To a radical understanding of social justice as involving to focus on “public causes of private pain” (Int 3 England)	Structural, activist and preventive/developmental dimensions of social justice from the micro to macro level.  Social justice as involving denouncing living conditions that are unjust and promoting fairer conditions.

A key area of findings of this research relates to my discovery, during the research process of a substantially differential understanding in England and Spain of the concepts of human rights and social justice, as well as of how these link to one another and with social work.

Drawing from my experience as a social work student in the two countries, I had initially anticipated to find through this research some generalizable differences in the teaching practices used to transmit human rights and social justice knowledge and values to social work students. It was the original focus of the research to explore such differential approaches to teaching and

learning about human rights and social justice in social work education in order to identify transferable good practices and recommendations for enhancing the teaching on human rights and social justice in each country. The research instruments, namely web surveys and qualitative interviews had been designed with this focus in mind and had been based on a specific understanding of the concepts of human rights and social justice and their links with social work which, at the point of designing the research instruments I believed was shared in social work education internationally.

Therefore, these research instruments did not contain questions asking participants directly about their understanding of these concepts. For the purposes of the research, at those initial stages I had defined human rights as the rights recognised in the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1949) as well as the changing, dialogical interpretations of what should be considered as basic human needs and rights by world people globally and locally. Social justice was defined as a state of society where human rights are respected and everyone is entitled to a fair share of the available resources and benefits of social cooperation. I believed that these definitions synthesised and conveyed the key elements of the definitions I had encountered during the literature review and were aligned with the discourses in relation to these two concepts from International Social work organisations, being therefore globally accepted or at least understood within the profession. In an attempt to clarify the research basis and design, I included these definitions in some of the research information sheets addressed to student participants but did not consider it necessary to include these in those for social work educators.

However, the responses to several of the survey questions together with some qualitative feedback on the survey from social work educators and final year students in England indicated a mismatch between the understanding of human rights, social justice and their links with social work of respondents in this country and the understanding of these concepts underlying the research design; an understanding mediated by my researcher subjectivity. This realisation was explored in greater depth through the subsequent qualitative interviews. These were crucial for me in confirming, explaining and contextualising the mismatch between my understanding of these concepts and some of the ideas around these that were widespread in social work education in England but of which I had been unaware of or perhaps “culturally blind” towards to some extent.

During the research process I have found two key points of difference in the understanding of human rights and social justice in social work and social work education in England and Spain:

1. A generalised legalistic and individualistic understanding of human rights in England vs a holistic understanding of human rights in Spain.
2. Linked to the above point, a generalised understanding of human rights and social justice as two separate concepts and areas of knowledge in England vs an understanding of human rights and social justice as a continuum or intrinsically linked concepts in Spain.

Interestingly, my first insights into these points of difference came as a result of the analysis of the web surveys' feedback and additional comments open questions.

### **England- Web surveys**

Whilst most of the comments to the web surveys of social work educators in England were positive and encouraging messages about the research, there were three comments which questioned the fact that many of the questions referred to "human rights and social justice" as inseparable concepts when in the respondents' opinion these can be better understood separately.

1. *Many of the questions talk about 'human rights and social justice' as though these terms are inevitably lined or inextricably woven together. In fact, is entirely possible to discuss human rights in terms of individuals' rights without any linkage to social justice. Therefore, there are many questions that lump these 2 things together that would have a very different answer if they asked about one or the other. This makes it hard to answer these questions as one has to choose whether one answers in terms of 'human rights' or 'social justice' or if one averages the two answers together, which means the answer is not accurate in terms of either. For example, if you ask, "how well is human rights and social justice integrated into the course?" or something similar, I would want to say very well for human rights and not very well for social justice - if I choose either 'very well' (or 'strongly agree' or whatever) or 'not very well' it is only accurate for one or the other, if I choose a middle answer it is accurate for neither. This may indicate a conceptual flaw (or indeed a valid premise that is not set out in the survey) that human rights and social justice are one and the same thing or so closely linked as to be indivisible OR it may indicate a need to refine the questionnaire (...).*
2. *(...) it would have been helpful to have some guidance about the boundaries of human rights and social justice to aid completion of the survey. Certainly I selected the option that my teaching does not relate to human rights and social justice to save time - perhaps not what was intended!*

3. *IMO [in my opinion, HR and SJ] they're not that similar. Social justice is more amenable to widely differing policy interpretations than human rights, and SJ doesn't have an explicit legal or treaty structure in UK law" A third comment supported the view that surveys would have benefitted from a definition of human rights and social justice from the onset of the survey*

As the first of these comments explains very clearly, the potential disagreement of respondents with the understanding of human rights and social justice as intrinsically linked on which web surveys were based would have important consequences in relation of the validity of the web surveys. Respondents that understood human rights and social justice as separate concepts, when responding to these questions would have been faced with two options: 1) choose which of the concepts to address in order to answer the questions or 2) select a middle point answer addressing the two concepts but inaccurate for each of them. The second comment supported the view that surveys would have benefitted from a definition of human rights and social justice from the onset of the survey.

The third comment addressing this is also enlightening, as the social work educator points to one key perceived difference between human rights and social justice in England. Human rights are seen within a legal structure in the UK whereas social justice is seen as broader area "amenable to widely differing policy interpretations". The BASW Human Rights Policy, produced in 2015 (after my data collection), concurred with my interpretation of research data as indicating a widespread narrow, legalistic, understanding of human rights in social work in the UK. In relation to the purpose of the policy, the BASW (2015: 4-5) asserts:

This policy seeks to recognise and address that "human rights" as they have been passed into legislation in the UK have often been given a narrower meaning than the understanding social workers have as a profession. It clearly distinguishes between carrying out duties as agents of the state and the need to do so compatibly with legal human rights obligations, from professional obligations, to work towards the achievement of universal human rights at all times and in all areas of practice.

Ife (2016) has highlighted the general dominance in Western social work of legal-based understandings of human rights, originated in the Enlightenment European tradition and UN human rights law. I agree with the above BASW statement that this is even more notably so the case in the UK, due to and additional impact on the public opinion and the social work profession of human rights national legislation introduced through the Human Rights Act 1998.

Ife (2016: 7) claims that social work needs to go beyond such legalistic approaches and engage with human rights narratives 'based on relationship, on human rights as collective, and as social' and which have the potential to form the basis for daily practices of professional social work and to enhance social work's transformative (rather than conservative) potential. This broader, social and structural view of human rights is very much aligned with the IFSW and IASSW's understanding of human rights in social work (IFSW and IASSW, 2014b; IFSW-Europe, 2012; IASSW and IFSW, 2004). This is a currently developing perspective (some lead authors are/ have been Jim Ife, Vishanthie Sewpaul, Lena Dominelli, or Silvia Staub-Bernasconi) which bounds together human rights and social justice. This broader understanding of human rights is clearly reflected in the understanding of human rights of the Spanish research participants. I believe this links to the fact that their views are much more strongly influenced by International social work perspectives than the views of participants in England, where the concerns of social work education have traditionally and currently been characterised by an inward-looking national focus (Sims, 2003) and international perspectives can be felt "as a luxury", as asserted by interviewee 3 in England. Conversely, social work in Spain has a history of openness to international influences and collaboration, having often sought to enhance the profession's knowledge and status nationally through international support (Méndez-Bonito, 2005).

As suggested before, coming from Spain where there is not a specific human rights law (being the UNDHR, human rights treaties and instruments endorsed by different pieces of legislation instead), and where human rights are arguably understood more holistically and as inclusive of social justice ideals within social work spheres, I had not anticipated such differential understanding. Illustrations of the holistic and interlinked understanding of human rights and social justice in Spain will be presented in the next points. Moreover, having reviewed the work of authors supporting a more holistic understanding of human rights as inclusive of first, second and third generation rights in the international social work literature, including the work of Domenilli (2010; 2007; 2004) from the UK, until I started to collect survey findings, I did not find, or notice, any evidence or indicators of a generalised legalistic understanding of human rights. As soon as I started my lecturer work at another UK university though, I was very surprised to come across this legalistic understanding of human rights and a separated understanding of the concepts of human rights and social justice. Being precisely this the topic of my PhD I have had many chances to discuss human rights and social justice with colleagues and students in my workplace and indeed, I have found this to be a possibly generalised understanding. Nonetheless, the data from this PhD, whilst allowing me to point to existent patterns of understandings of HR and SJ in the two countries, does not yield evidence on the extent to which each of these is extended. Generalising

from these ideas would require further quantitative research. The messages from the comments in the surveys had important implications for the research and made me aware of the importance of handling the data from the web surveys in England with caution. Interviews with the social work educators in England would allow me to continue to explore the differential understanding of human rights and social justice in greater depth.

Regarding the web surveys of final year students in the UK, 2 out of 4 comments were positive and encouraging but the other two highlighted respectively that the survey was very general, being unclear "*what exactly it was trying to achieve*" (comment 1) and that the questions were "*quite complex*" (comment 2). In contrast, none of the 7 comments by social work educators in Spain or 17 out of 18 comments by social work students in Spain raised any issues in relation to difficulties in understanding the survey questions, being virtually all these comments highly positive and encouraging. An exception was the only critical comment from a social work student in Spain, which suggested that it would have been useful that the survey explained the difference between human rights and social justice, in case some people did not understand the concepts well, a criticism I agree with.

Considering all the survey comments together led me to believe that the survey design was better in tune with the understanding of human rights and social justice of social work educators and students from Spain than with that of educators and students in England, realising that the surveys design reflected my cultural background and positioning in this research. Realising this felt troublesome at the beginning and made me question the quality of the research. However, I realised on reflection that becoming aware of my own cultural bias had been an important discovery during the research process and had assisted my journey towards achieving an understanding of more specific cultural differences in the understanding of these concepts in social work education in the two countries. Being able to outline these differences clearly and systematically by the end of this research is arguably a result of learning experientially from "misunderstandings" like this during my immersion in the two contrasting cultural contexts - Spanish and English- during the research.



## England- Interviews

The interviews in England suggested a further but related nuance in the understanding of human rights and social justice in England: the individualistic connotations of human rights versus perceived collective values underpinning social justice ideals.

Interviewee 2, England:

*My interest is more in the relationship between SJ and SW ... although I recognise the role of HR in social work as an important area, is not an area in which I consider myself to have specific expertise. So my orientation is more towards notions of social justice than it is towards the relation to HR in an active sense. Obviously it is in a general sense. I think the issue for me is that the notion of rights tends to individualise and I think that, although that's important there are limits to that. And I think that a collective orientation underpins notions of social justice, some notions or the notions I would adhere to, means that in my teaching I orient toward the idea of social work for social justice and having a social justice orientation in my teaching more than I would explicitly argue for a human rights orientation, I don't know if that makes sense...*

Interviewee 3 (speaking about the Social Work BSc programme):

*I suppose the other thing is obviously the international definition is, I think, a hugely contradictory document but the thing... the themes within that that do talk about Social Justice and Human Rights are the ones that we would emphasise. And I suppose within those we would emphasise the Social Justice issues more than the Human Rights issues. Not that the Human Rights issues aren't important but sometimes if you talk about them in terms of Human Rights they become individualised rights whereas if you talk about them in terms of Social Justice they become collective rights and collective aspirations to deal with. So we, certainly I, would emphasise the collective struggle for Social Justice incorporating individuals and group rights rather than a teaching that focuses on individual rights because it tends to individualise things but that's just a personal thing, I'm not sure the rest of my team would do that.*

Arguably, the individualistic connotations of human rights versus collective values underpinning social justice ideals highlighted by the interviewees, are directly related to the above discussed understanding of human rights in England as confined to the first generation rights enshrined by the UK Human Rights Act 1998, and as linked the New Labour political project that implemented and continues to support the Act amidst a current conservative backlash against it.

Whilst, from the interview data, I understand that interviewee 2 (England) holds a belief in the split between individual rights and collectively oriented social justice ideals, I appreciate a more complex understanding of their relationship in the words of interviewee 3 (England), who asserts that *“not that the Human Rights issues aren’t important but sometimes if you talk about them in terms of Human Rights they become individualised rights whereas if you talk about them in terms of Social Justice they become collective rights”*. I find this is a very interesting assertion where interviewee 3 (England) recognises that some issues that are human rights issues are better dealt with from social justice perspectives so they do not become individualised. It seems to be the case that, aware of a widespread understanding of human rights as individual rights the most pragmatic and inspirational way to deal with some human rights issues is to translate these to a social justice language. Whereas I would argue for, and recommend the opposite course of action: educating students in a broad, holistic, collective, and inspirational understanding of human rights that would “guide us on the road to justice” (Dominelli, 2007: 41-42; Ife, 2008), both interviews support the claim that in England, given its legalistic and individualistic connotations, human rights are a concept distant from the civil society and social justice activism.

In Spain, however, the concept of human rights is arguably much further felt as “owned” by the civil society and the social work profession. I discussed in previous chapters how broad human right based approaches and language have been strongly present in the social critique of anti-austerity social movements that emerged in Spain in 2011, as well as in the campaigning and collective action in the defense of public social services supported and promoted by the Consejo de Trabajo Social (Spanish National Association of Social Workers) in recent years.

Whereas dealing with human rights issues from social justice perspectives may be a pragmatic way to deal with this in the short term, I believe a re-appropriation of human rights holistic discourses would allow English social workers, activists and society to claim both rights and justice at home at the same time that enabling to understand and learn from and join forces in the struggles from global justice as it has been claimed before (IFSW-Europe, 2012; Ferguson, 2008; Finn and Jacobson, 2003a). This would allow the social work profession in England to make the most of both human rights inspirational and legal forces (Ife, 2008) and to better understand and speak the language of international social work documents and of many colleagues and activists engaged in social justice struggles abroad. I believe that Spanish social work offers powerful examples of this. As Ife (2008) and Dominelli (2007; 2004) have claimed, social work education has a key role in enabling this perspective.

## Spain-Interviews

In contrast with the social work educators in England, the four interviewees in Spain seemed comfortable speaking about human rights AND social justice as a continuum or differential but intrinsically linked concepts, and none of them pointed to the need to separate the two concepts in order to articulate their responses or express their views during the interview.

Interviewee 4 (Spain), when asked about the relationship between human rights, social justice and social work asserted *“I understand that social work is clearly linked with the struggle for justice, and the struggle for justice is a struggle for human rights”*.

Interviewee 1 (Spain) stated that *“social work has as a pillar, as a foundation, and thus as a channel always to travel together with the defense of human rights and to establish norms and possible mechanisms for social justice find a better relief”*.

Interviewee 2 (Spain) (quote continues later) expressed *“Well, I do not know if what I am going to say is perhaps a little presumptuous, but I would say that social work is THE profession oriented to the promotion of human rights and social justice”*

And Interviewee 3 asserted that HR and SJ are “closely interlinked” in their module of XXXXX, *“a module revolving around one and the other”* ... Or, for example, at a different point of the interview they asserted that *“internship students show more knowledge, or more awareness in relation to the topic of human rights, to the topic of social justice”*

Whereas the interviewees in England highlighted human rights’ legalistic and individualistic connotations, interviewees in Spain conveyed a much broader understanding of human rights, as ranging from individual to collective rights, and tended to focus on a moral/ philosophical approach to human rights. Social work educators in Spain reported that governments, legal powers, citizens and professions all share human rights responsibilities, being social work a key profession tasked with the promotion of human rights.

## An additional note on the understanding of social justice in England

This is not something that appears directly in the research findings, probably due to the fact that the formulation of survey and interview questions did not prompt participants’ views on this. However, from my experiences as both an insider and outsider in social work educational contexts in England and Spain, I have noticed that the concept of social justice in England and of its role in social work education appears to be as contested and politicised as the concept of human rights.

Particularly since I started to work as a social work lecturer in a different University I have had many chances to discuss with new colleagues the topic of my research (human rights and social justice in social work education) and, in the same way I have been surprised by the existence of a narrow and legalistic understanding of human rights, I have also frequently come across a similarly narrow notion of social justice. This a notion of social justice in social work from which social workers meet the social justice principles of the profession by enabling service users to become functional members of society and therefore have a chance to move up in the different “social ladders” within the legal and policy frameworks. From this perspective, questioning these frameworks or the underlying status quo on service users’ behalf is seen as out of the boundaries of social workers’ role in promoting social justice, and any related actions on the part of professionals would be regarded as unprofessional and politically (leftist) radical.

The below preface of the UK Centre for Social Justice “Social justice manifesto for 2015” policy paper may serve as an illustration of this approach. According to their own definition, the Centre for Social Justice is a UK “independent” think-tank “established in 2004 to seek effective solutions to poverty”. Interestingly, my searches for academic literature in scientific databases on social justice and social work in the UK did not yield any references based on this understanding of social justice and therefore this conception of social justice in the UK had remained unnoticed by me. Arguably, the lack of a scientific foundation for this understanding of the concept of social justice, could point to a strategy of political co-option of this term, to an ideological manipulation seeking to separate the concept of social justice from its more radical connotations in the public opinion and the mainstream ideology in the practice and training of the so called helping professions, such as such as social work.

This is a manifesto for a stronger Britain. As we set out in these pages, during the next Parliament politicians have an opportunity to transform lives, society and our economy by tackling the root causes of disadvantage. ***This is because social justice, helping those on the margins of our society, benefits everybody (my emphasis).***

Changing the lives of the poorest people enriches our nation. When families on the margins find stability, work and independence from the social breakdown that holds them back, more adults and children have a chance to thrive. More people become net contributors within society and demands on the public purse reduce. We all gain. (...)  
(CSJ, 2015:3)

As suggested above, this is a note on an exploratory observation during my research which would require the support from further research to be formulated as a generalizable claim.

## Understandings of the relationship between human rights, social justice and social work (an ideological debate)

The previous section has highlighted two key points of difference in the understanding of the concepts of human rights and social justice in social work and social work education in England and Spain:

1. A generalised legalistic and individualistic understanding of human rights in England vs a holistic understanding of human rights in Spain.
2. Linked to the above point, a generalised understanding of human rights and social justice as two separate concepts and areas of knowledge in England vs an understanding of human rights and social justice as a continuum or intrinsically linked concepts in Spain

There is an additional important point of difference of understandings in social work education in the two countries, which relates to the perceived links between human rights, social justice and social work, including the role of these concepts and values in social work education in England and Spain. In this regard I have found through this research:

3. A perception of human rights and social justice as contested concepts and values in social work education in England versus an unproblematic commitment to broad principles of human rights and social justice in social work education in Spain, where such commitment is seen as an intrinsic and natural part of the profession.

In the web surveys, the vast majority of social work educators and final year students in England and Spain, asserted to believe that there is an important relationship between human rights Social Justice and social work daily practice, as well as between human rights, social justice, and social work theory. But it was the qualitative interviews that allowed for an exploration of the complexities behind the understanding of the links between human rights, social justice and social work by educators in the two countries.

## **Qualitative interviews**

In line with the survey respondents, all the interviewees expressed to believe that there is a very strong relationship between human rights, social justice and social work. Whilst each of the interviewees offered their own views and nuanced understandings of these relationships, there are arguably some common patterns in the formulation of the rationales offered depending on whether they were social work educators from an English or a Spanish institution. The following table summarises these:

**TABLE 23 UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE RELATIONSHIP HUMAN RIGHTS-SOCIAL JUSTICE-AND SOCIAL WORK**

	HUMAN RIGHTS-SOCIAL JUSTICE-SOCIAL WORK	
	INTERVIEWEES ENGLAND	INTERVIEWEES SPAIN
Place of human rights and social justice in social work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contested.</li> <li>Political drives to push these out from the profession.</li> <li>Need to defend their place.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unquestionable.</li> <li>Human rights and social justice are seen as intrinsically and historical bound with the social work profession.</li> </ul>
Rationale for the importance of the relationship HR, SJ and SJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns about how the economic crisis, austerity and the social work profession in ITSELF are resulting in social injustice.</li> <li>Moral and political values leading social work educators to take a stand and resist social injustice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International social work definition and the profession's ethics.</li> <li>Human rights instruments and the Spanish Constitution establishing Spanish Welfare state.</li> <li>Concerns about how the economic crisis and austerity are leading to human rights violations and social injustice affecting vulnerable people.</li> </ul>
Role of social work and social work education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mainstream social work in England increasingly oppressive.</li> <li>Reshaped by neoliberalism, embraces neoliberal ideology.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responsible for the human rights and promoting social justice.</li> <li>Critical and helping profession.</li> <li>Resisting neoliberalism.</li> </ul>
Approach to analysis and discussion of this relationship during interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specific and detailed.</li> <li>Focused on present contexts and on the future.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad, generally theoretical and often abstract views.</li> <li>Focused on history and present time.</li> </ul>

## SPAIN

In Spain, the values of human rights and social justice are arguably seen as intrinsically and historically bound with the social work profession. Documents and discourses produced by the international social work organisations, notably the IFSW International definitions of social work, and the documents related to social work ethics are referred to as main sources of legitimization of these values in the profession. Other sources of legitimization mentioned by social work educators in Spain are the broad legislative framework and welfare state established by the Spanish Constitution (rather than more specific pieces of legislation) under which the social work profession operates, and human rights international instruments such as the UNDHR.

For example, interviewee 1 in Spain asserted that she believed that the relationships HR-SJ-social work was “*extremely close*”, and that “*the triple alliance HR, SJ and SW is highly powerful. It has been powerful [throughout history] it is now and it will have to remain powerful, I mean, we have to go constantly hand in hand*”.

Her rationale was based on three main points:

1. The IFSW international definitions of social work (IFSW, 2000; draft of IFSW and IASSW, 2014)
2. Spanish Constitution and Spanish welfare state
3. Social work ethics

*The IFSW 2000 definition notes these [HR and SJ] as fundamental pillars and the new definition even assimilates HR and SJ as the motivation and justification of social work. Therefore, from the very roots of our profession it is clearly being made explicit the fact that social work has as a pillar, as a foundation, and thus as a channel always to travel together with the defense of human rights and to establish norms and possible mechanisms for social justice find a better relief* (Interviewee 1 Spain).

In the view of the social work educators in Spain, social work as a profession has a very important and unquestionable responsibility to defend HR and promote SJ. They noted that this is of particular relevance at the present time facing the effects of the crisis on the most vulnerable and the austerity measures implemented in the country, which result in social injustice and human rights violations, considering human rights as including social and collective rights. Hence, in comparison with the legalistic role of social workers in England facing human rights where social workers are expected to comply with and protect service users’ individual rights under the Human Rights Act 1998, the role of social workers in promoting human rights from the Spanish perspective goes much further beyond an individualised legalistic approach; it involves



denouncing and addressing structural sources of injustice and of the violation of vulnerable individuals and communities' human rights. Social work educators in Spain tended as well to make more links between local and global contexts. However, the discussions about human rights and social justice in social work tended to be more theoretical, abstract and general than those by the social work educators in England.

Interviewee 1 in Spain, asserted that the profession should be the “*banner*” of HR and SJ. Social workers need to take responsibility for HR and SJ, and increase their understanding of HR and SJ through individual, group and community social work. Her understanding of human rights is broad and collective, including first, second and third generation human rights:

*It is important for students to understand the broadness and the importance of HR... to understand that HR have to do with education, self-determination, participation, the possibility of achieving a dignified life... human rights involve everyone and we all have to contribute as community members to prevent human rights from being violated*

She referred to the three generations of rights, emphasizing that in the current Spanish context second generation rights (economic and social) were being violated or at risk of being violated facing cuts in benefits and support social services.

Interviewee 2 in Spain acknowledged and highlighted the importance in social work of promoting the structural dimensions of the concepts of both human rights and social justice, including denouncing injustice. She also highlighted the importance of considering human rights and social justice from local to global levels.

*Well, I do not know if what I am going to say is perhaps a little presumptuous, but I would say that social work is THE profession oriented to the promotion of human rights and social justice. We [in the SW degree] always emphasize this structural dimension.... While I believe that the social worker professional profile is the par excellence profile of helping relationships, I think it is also the quintessential professional profile of denounce, promotion, prevention, of accompanying communities in the process to achieve more ability to claim their rights, to denounce living conditions that are certainly not socially just, and to promote fairer conditions...*

*... That of the social worker is for me a professional profile who is capable of dealing with work at micro-levels but at the same time make people, families, groups and communities more aware and capable to achieve the conditions that would allow them to live with more justice, with more dignity and with more human rights. But a social worker also has capacity to have an impact on politics, on public society ... I always say that social workers should earn ... a place in political and*

*public debates, in the public science of promotion g social justice and human rights. And I believe that from a very global perspective.*

She explains later on in the interview that this does not mean to forget about the practice with individuals in anyway but that, rather, this involves that social work needs to contribute to the debate of new models of citizenship to fit current contexts and that social workers must have a say in developing social services that would allow to build sustainability from the “micro” level upwards to sustain social justice. She emphasises the importance of facilitating social participation and networking within the communities to achieve empowerment of individuals and communities, what would result in greater wellbeing and social justice.

Interviewee 4 (Spain) discussed human rights from a citizenship rights perspective

*Social workers should promote the advancement of the human rights struggles of the people we work with; of whom we are involved with... I believe this is more visible in international cooperation, in work with less developed areas where awareness raising and empowerment of people is very important, and this seems more aligned with the recognition of human rights and the popular claim of these, but today in our neighbourhoods, on the streets, in social services, local associations, there is a recognition of human rights. The 15M movement is at the end of the day a movement that seeks to recover a reflection about human rights and to reclaim that we are here, we want to decide about our lives, and we will not accept to be treaded down. And I think that the social worker is the professional that seeks to reclaim this, or should be the professional that seeks to reclaim this.*

She also mentioned that there are frontline social workers who feel they have a responsibility to tell people the truth about how their rights are being “trampled on” when they are not granted the social services and support they need. Even when working with individuals, she seems to be approaching human rights from an ethical perspective rather than from a strictly legalistic approach to human rights.

*“We [social work course] believe in a person centred social work, we try to highlight that what is important is what the person thinks, to recover the person, to help them recover control of their lives and I believe that that empowerment, that individualisation is linked to a human rights recognition.”* (Interviewee 4, Spain)

It can be argued that in Spanish social work there is a vivid awareness of the relatively recent history of collective struggles for the establishment of democratic and social rights in Spain, in which the profession was involved (Sanz Cintora, 2001). Whereas radical social work in England

has historically been an influential but minority and government- surveilled current in England (Lavalette, 2011), radical approaches to the profession (involving in Spain social change for social justice aims) were widespread in social work between the 1960s and 1980s (Sanz Cintora, 2001). In the 80s, the profession had fundamental and autonomous roles in the development of the public system of social services (Domenech, 1990) based on community development and social rights models and approaches. Despite a turn towards a more bureaucratic and individualised social work since the 1990s, it can be argued that social work has been a much more political and autonomous profession in Spain than in England, with confidence in the structural change and social rights promotion functions of the profession which are also reinforced by the IFSW ideology at present time.

## ENGLAND

The social work educators that were interviewed in England also expressed their alignment to the values of human rights and, most of all, social justice. They defended the need to promote these values within the social work profession, too. However, the rationales they offered about the importance of the alliance HR-SJ-social work, linked more closely with their personal and or political values, and with their concerns about the current situation and future directions of social work (including social work education) in England.

### Interviewee 1 England

*I think essentially, you can't do social work without an understanding of HR and SJ. I think otherwise you endanger. And I think what is happening with social work as I understand it in England at the minute is that it's now a system for fixing people to fit the system.*

### Interviewee 2 England

*... from the age of about 12 I have been interested in issues of social justice and being politically oriented if you like ... And the reason I was drawn towards working in social care was because I felt it was one way of realising the notion of social justice. So for me the relationship between social work or social care practice and social justice have always been kind of intimately interrelated I feel. And this is one form of practice in which we can take forward the social justice agenda and for me that always sat alongside my political practice as an activist, a political activist. So for me it was a way of, I felt it was a space in which my work my employment could sit comfortably alongside my political values. So for me social work and social care was a space in which those kinds of values could, at least potentially, be realised.*

### Interviewee 3 England

*I say to them [students], you know, in my view the people that social workers work with are from the most marginalised sections of society, they get a hard time in society, they get a hard time from all institutions in society... they deserve one group of professionals, we will stand up and speak out for them and be alongside them and that's my vision of what the social worker should be... We emphasise it throughout the course, whenever we can we talk to them about the social causes of private pain and social causes, social problems, the political nature of social workers' tasks ... I suppose the other thing is obviously the international definition is, I think, a hugely contradictory document but the thing... the themes within that that do talk about social justice and human rights are the ones that we would emphasise.*

As the social work educators in Spain, the social work educators in England reported to be concerned about the direct effects of neoliberal politics and mechanisms on the most vulnerable groups of people in the English society, but they also highlighted as a main concern about the further oppression of these groups by a welfare system and a social work profession that are being reshaped along neoliberal lines.

### Interviewee 1 England

*[In the department there is a] very strong ethos around you know we work to build understanding and practice in terms of social justice kind of approaches and models. But one of my concerns is I suppose is that as much as we do that here in the department, and we teach students to think about, and we raise issues with students to think about human rights and social justice, I wonder if that's all undone when it comes to practice ...*

*... Other thing I would say is about commercialisation .... And I think what happens is there's not the same attention to detail and standard in terms of qualified social workers, then people can essentially do some real harm and people won't get the support that they need. And it'll come back to a system where you're paid, the government will pay you to fix the family and then you move on. We have 'troubled families' ... It essentially is [expects social workers to] fix a family in a fortnight, but you don't get paid until you evidence that you fixed this family and then you move on... That's not the kind of social work anybody thinks is a good idea. We've seen privatising child protection services and stuff and that's just... not ok on any level to think that that's gonna benefit or alleviate or balance some of that, the inequalities going on, it's not, it's just going to enable people to earn money out of people's desperate situations which is morally wrong*

## Interviewee 2 England

*I have to say in England rather than the UK, there has been an attempt by the current government to intervene and reshape the terrain on which social work education operates, so an attempt to shape the knowledge base of the discipline and place kind of political constraints of this discipline. The former education secretary... Michael Gove, commissioned a report which was highly critical of social work education and sought to depoliticise I would say, sought to attack the emphasis on social justice and human rights more broadly within social work education. So, more than ever I think it is important that departments like this attempt to integrate an idea of social justice in particular, and human rights, into the programme.*

*We can give a lecture about what we mean by social justice and yes, we can give a series of lectures on critical theorists, but then the question is 'how is that translated into practice?' particularly in a context in Britain where neoliberal managerialism has very significantly constrained the space for even for more relationship forms of practice, let alone radical practice. Even just you know what it's seem as mainstream practice, based on you know relationships, therapeutic or supportive relationships is very limited.*

## Interviewee 3 England

*.... Another group of problems facing us, I think, is the assault on professionalism, an attempt to control social work. The third area I think has to do with the outsourcing and privatisation of Social Work services ... you know whether it's prison services controlled by G4S, Adult Social Care run by Serco or Southern Cross, the Tory plans to privatise and outsource looked-after children facilities... this is a major problem because privatisation in these services don't put the needs of service users at the heart of their agenda, they put the priority is profit and profit maximisation and a second-class service for service users. And the fourth issue is the attempt to undermine and devalue social work education (...)*

The social work educators from the English University, while confident in the rationale for their department's social justice oriented approach to the profession, expressed they were aware that their views were likely in the minority and did not reflect the current mainstream ideology in the profession in England (more illustrative quotes are provided in next section). Except for the above comment of interviewee 3, they did not refer to the profession's national or international bodies as sources of legitimation for their views\*, being these organisations very rarely mentioned in the interviews.

## 2. Underlying ideology of understandings and teaching practices regarding human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain

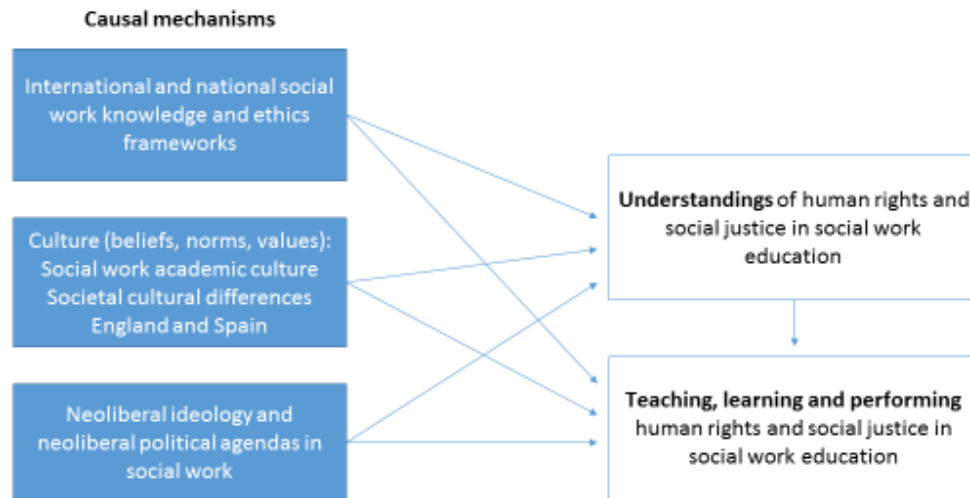
In this section of the chapter I address the second research question (consisting in two sub-questions), which was: “What are the main characteristics of social work education’s contexts in England and Spain – including underlying ideologies and political agendas? How do these impact the teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in social work?”.

The research data suggests that broad human rights and social justice principles are at the core of social work education in Spain, whereas their place in social work education in England is highly contested. As put by Higgins (2015: 4) in England there is currently ‘a struggle for the soul of social work’ where a narrow, managerialist version of the profession promoted by the government problematises and attempts to remove from the profession, including social work education, broad human rights and social justice based social work models such as those currently promoted by the IFSW (Sewpaul and Jones, 2005; IFSW and IASSW, 2014b; IFSW-Europe, 2012) and which are readily welcome and promoted by the profession in Spain. These two versions of social work (narrower, broader) not only have implications in relation to the understandings of the role of human rights and social justice in social work in each country, but they arguably influence pedagogic models, attitudes and teaching methods used by social work educators embracing each of the perspectives. Teaching practices in relation to human rights and social justice in the two countries are explored in the next section of this chapter. As I believe ideology impacts teaching practices, I discuss this first.

An exploration of potential causal mechanisms of the differential patterns observed in the two countries focusing on the role of ideology has allowed me to propose a series of explanations (or theorisation) of current differences. Comparative thinking and an awareness of historic developments in social work education in the two countries have been key in carrying out this task.

The structure of the causal mechanisms model I propose is illustrated in the following graph:

FIGURE 4 CAUSAL MECHANISMS MODEL



It is my argument that both in England and Spain, there is a confrontation between a) the (positive) ideology underlying social work's international ethical commitment to human rights and social justice (reflected in British and Spanish codes of ethics) – I will refer to this as “social work international ethics ideology”- and b) the neoliberal ideology underlying “narrow” models of social work education (spreading in England and Spain), which undermine social justice values and co-opt and narrow down the scope of human rights and social justice concepts.

Ideology, from a neutral, descriptive point of view, can be defined as a ‘systematic body of ideas’ (Hall, 1977: 4). These may include collective beliefs, values and interests (Carey and Foster, 2011: 250). However, in critical theory the concept of ideology most frequently involves negative connotations and is attributed a role in maintaining power and domination (Thompson, 1984). In this sense, Fairclough (2010: 9) asserts that ‘interpretations and explanations can be said to be ideological if they can be shown to be not just inadequate but also necessary- necessary to establish and keep in place particular relations of power’. According to Fairclough (2010), this understanding of ideology sets a basis for assessing whether specific discourses (involving explanations and interpretations) are at the service of power (ideological) and resulting in social wrongs which need to be mitigated in order overcome limitations on human well-being. However, Fairclough (2010: 2) also notes that critical theory can additionally seek social justice aims through

‘positive critique’ that identifies and analyses ways in which negative ideology and oppressive power relations are being mitigated and can be further resisted.

In this research, I have found that social work international agreements on professional ethics and values, such as the codes of ethics from the IFSW and IASSW and Spanish and British social work codes of ethics can be considered a systematic body of ideas, beliefs, interests of the profession capable of producing emancipatory discourses capable to neutralise negative ideological expressions of neoliberalism. Hence, I find useful to refer to this as “positive ideology”.

In my view, both are in tension, and have an impact on social work education in both countries, in what regards the role of human rights and social justice, affecting the understanding of these social work principles and teaching and learning practices around these. This dynamic is mediated by the cultural elements (beliefs, social norms and values) that characterise the contexts of social work education in each country, which would assist or resist the spread in social work education of these two opposing ideologies. Hence, in critical realist terms, these two ideologies (international social work ethics and neoliberal ideology), together with the culture of social work education in each country form three main causal mechanisms with a good self-sufficient explanatory power. However, there are other possible causal mechanisms which I have identified and I acknowledge have a capacity to mediate in the effects and expressions of the three main mechanisms identified and which I punctually refer to in my interpretation of findings. These include: anti-capitalist ideology, social work professional status, socio-economic contexts, national legal frameworks or individual characteristics of social work educators and students.

## Neoliberal ideology

### *Neoliberal globalisation*

The neoliberal global capitalist system, controlled by institutions which include the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and by political and business leaders (Jordan and Drakeford, 2012; Lundy, 2011; Dominelli, 2010; Ferguson, 2008; Dominelli and Khan, 2000:96), shares essential characteristics with traditional forms of capitalism. However, it is argued, it is the speed of its processes, the reach of capital accumulation on a global scale, and the ‘erosion of sovereignty and democracy within nation-states’ (both developing and developed); this differentiates neoliberalism from prior expressions of capitalism (Lundy, 2011:4).



According to its advocates, the neoliberal globalization that is shaping the world entails 'a process of global improvement of people's living conditions and a reduction of inequalities at the global level' (Méndez et al., 2006:466, my translation). From these perspectives, 'enabling the wealthier sections of society, and especially business, to have more disposable income through tax cuts and by lowering wages lead not only to higher profits and more investment - which improves the global competitiveness of the economy- but also to better allocation of resources and therefore more jobs and welfare for everyone' (Dominelli and Khan, 2000:102). Hence, from this view, the welfare state needs to be reduced in order to give way to greater market flexibility, and politics of austerity are justified for economies to adapt to the pressures of financial markets .

There is, however, overwhelming evidence of the fact that the free market and the retreat of wellbeing programmes are in reality enhancing inequality among and within countries, causing increasing hardship to the most vulnerable and leading to social exclusion to growing segments of world's population (Jordan and Drakeford, 2012 ; Lundy: 2011:4-5; Dominelli, 2010; Méndez et al: 2006:486-7; Dominelli and Khan, 2000). The search for economic benefits through practices such as dismantling of industries in an area for its transfer to other areas reporting the higher benefits (regardless of the social suffering costs), is leading to mass unemployment, job insecurity, social exclusion and exploitation of people (often including children) (Méndez et al, 2006; Dominelli and Khan, 2000) and the environment (Dominelli, 2010).

Furthermore, it was the policies of deregulation and market liberalisation implemented by financial institutions as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (specifically the deregulation of the US banking system) that prompted in 2007 the worst economic crisis of capitalism since the Great Depression (Lundy, 2011:7). Almost ten years later, the effects of this economic downturn together with those of the austerity measures and strongly neoliberal response strategies agreed by the leaders of the most powerful capitalist countries are still hindering countries' economies worldwide and downgrading the quality of life of millions of people, especially the poorer and less powerful (UNDP, 2011). Even in countries with a history of welfare provision such as England and Spain these are particularly challenging times for people in need of welfare services and resources, and for frontline welfare workers who are expected to deal with increasingly severe and complex social problems with ever-smaller resources and control over their professions.

Nonetheless, apart from affecting the contexts in which social work operates by producing such social problems and suffering and eroding social work agencies' resources, governments aligned with neoliberal ideology have been shaping for decades the social work profession itself by reshaping it more or less explicitly along the global market requirements, including its underlying neoliberal values ideology. Ferguson has argued that social work appears to have, indeed, a role to play in market societies across the world, as it is reflected in the expansion of social work education in the Bologna process of European education harmonization or in the fact that social work schools and bodies are quickly spreading in 'newly marketised societies' such as Eastern European or China (Lorenz, 2005b, cited in Ferguson, 2008:10). However, the scientific expertise expected from social workers in "marketised" societies tends to revolve around social control of risky individuals, behaviours and social phenomena (Ferguson, 2008; Dominelli, 2004).

### *'Neoliberal social work'*

Dominelli (1996, cited in Dominelli and Khan, 2000), Ferguson (2008), or Banks (2006) amongst others, have expressed how in the UK and England in particular government led marketisation processes have reshaped social work and diminished its autonomy and professional scope and standards.

These processes include: 'the recommodification of service delivery; greater managerial controls of the workforce and consequent reduction of professional autonomy; a technicist orientation to social work education and training; the undermining of therapeutic approaches by a shift of focus to procedural and bureaucratic forms of assessment; budget-controlled and budget-focused packages of care; greater feminization of the profession as pay and working conditions decline' (Dominelli and Khan, 2000:103-4). Experiences and concerns of teaching about social work human rights and social justice concepts in this professional context, were reflected in previous quotes from interviewees in England. The UK's case is well documented, and as asserted by interviewee 3 in England, considered to be at the forefront of these processes. But many of these market-oriented, deskilling, and deprofessionalising processes affecting social work can be found in other developed western countries to different extents, including Spain (e.g. De la Red and Brezmes, 2009; Lundy, 2011).

As Dominelli and Khan (2000:104) highlight, conceiving the dismantling of the welfare state as a direct and necessary consequence of the global economic forces would be too simplistic though. Additional forces, such as politics and ideology, have also played their important part in the advancement of global neoliberalism. Neoliberal governments (either conservative or social democratic) have used the conflict and pressures caused by globalization as an argument to

further justify the adoption of neoliberal politics involving the retreat of welfare provision and human rights (Ferguson, 2008). As far as social work is concerned, the apparent decline in states' governance and ability to protect rights and sustain social cohesion results in a vision of the profession that cannot but embrace uncertainty, manage risks and reject unattainable aspirations for social workers about their control of unmanageable environments. Therefore, the focus descends from the international to local contexts and social problems are dealt with from relativistic and arguably narrow professional perspectives (Dominelli and Khan, 2000).

Hence, for 'neoliberal social work' (Jones, 2004) issues and values regarding oppression and social justice need to be pushed off the focus of the profession, (or out its boundaries, in some expressions of this). And structural and critical facets of social work are seen and presented by governments as problematic and in need of reform (Ferguson, 2008). Moreover, Ferguson (2008:18) argues, even more traditional values of social work, such as respect for persons or belief in individual change and traditional relationship based interventions are increasingly becoming under moral attack as 'the demonization and scapegoating of particular social groups, such as young people and asylum seekers' is advanced in neoliberal societies.

Whereas particular strategies vary among countries, the construction with the complicity of mass media, of a moral panic around 'troublesome groups' causing 'new forms of social unrest' and around the burden of welfare dependency has been commonly used to disguise the structural nature of inequalities and social conflicts and to reinforce ideas regarding individuals' responsibility for their fate and wellbeing (Dominelli and Khan, 2000: 104). Moral panic is used in a 'parasitic' (Jordon and Ashford, 1993, cited in Dominelli and Khan, 2000: 104) and opportunistic way by governments to justify further neoliberal readjustments. These processes of victimisation of vulnerable groups and social work service users were highlighted in some way by all the social work educators interviewed in the two countries, who insisted on the importance of helping social work students understand and overcome prejudices associated with negative images and ideological discourses about these groups.

Against these global processes, many social work academics and stakeholders globally, in England and in Spain, have argued that the philosophy, principles and values of the neoliberal market are antithetical and irreconcilable with those of social work, rooted in notions of human dignity and rights, social justice, universalism, democracy and citizenship (e.g. Dominelli, 2010; Dominelli and Khan, 2000; Eroles, 1997; Ferguson, 2008; Ife, 2001; Ife, 2008). But there are in the social work scientific community those who are less reluctant to embrace a neoliberal view of the world, and to engage with the controlling role neoliberal governments assign social work, for reasons such as

the benefits for the professional and scientific status this line of work can bring the profession (e.g. Shaw, 2003)). To a greater extent in England than in Spain, these controlling features of the profession have been predominant in social work history, despite having coexisted with more radical perspectives (Ferguson, 2008; Payne, 2005; Bamford, 2015). And narrow, neoliberal models of social work continue to be the dominant “paradigm” in contemporary social work in England (Higgins, 2015)

## Culture and history

It can be argued that the historical and current misalignment of social work with social justice and broad human rights ideals in England may be partly explained by the historical links of the profession with western capitalist welfare states. In these states, social work, as a profession aimed to respond to the economic and social needs of people, originated as a reaction to the social problems of the late 19th century’s industrialisation (Lundy, 2011:3; Dominelli, 2010:11; Eroles, 1997:17). This was the so-called “social question” that emerged from the conflicts between the working and ruling classes in Europe, North America and Australia.

The responsibility for these answers was first assumed by charitable organizations and was gradually extended to the national states, which became the main guarantors of social welfare along the 20th century (Lundy, 2011:3). Thus, the capitalist economy and the state sponsored responses to the “social question” (with social work as a key profession) have since developed alongside each other. If such relationship between capitalism and state welfare has always been complex, highly contradictory and tense, coexistence between both arguably becomes untenable at the current late stage of capitalism, commonly referred to as 'neoliberal global capitalism' (Lundy, 2011:6). Within the neoliberal capitalist logic ‘addressing societal inequalities and social structures that contribute to such conditions are no longer part of the political agenda of most countries across the globe’ (Lundy, 2011:15).

In Spain, however, the relationship between capitalism, welfare and the nation state has followed a different path, given the later and underdeveloped establishment of a welfare state. Reasons for this link to the country’s international isolation and lack of democratic and welfare rights during its 20th century dictatorial past (1939-1975) and the complex merging process during that century between the social work ‘scientific’ profession and the catholic charity tradition of welfare provision. In the relationship between Spanish social work and the welfare state, which started with democracy in the 80s, the profession’s dependence on government funding has been

limited. During democracy, social work has never been subjected to significant governmental control. Hence, it has maintained great autonomy in relation to its educational system, and its knowledge and value base. With social workers in Spain historically showing strong “vocational” (linked with nurturance and charity values and traditions) rather than “employment oriented” reasons for (women, mostly) joining the profession, the profession has also maintained autonomy from market pressures in relation to recruitment (Méndez-Bonito, 2005). The following quotes may help illustrate this:

#### Interviewee 1 in England

*It is, particularly in the UK a system where people go to work and they find jobs, and students when they graduate, they wanna find work. They're in a position of 'do you hold on your moral values or do you take work when you know you need work?'. I think there's a real wrestle with those kind of things. So I don't know how much social work in practice is actually making a difference and supporting and changing people's situations in that sense around the HR and SJ. I think it's not in a good place as we would want it to be.*

#### Interviewee 3 Spain

*There is a high level of commitment and vocation [towards HR and SJ] one has and develops when making the decision of studying social work... I believe that the majority of social work students.... are very vocational and very eager to change the world.*

#### Interviewee 1 Spain

*In relation to their values and beliefs, social work students are very sensitive towards social issues so it is very difficult that you find someone against [HR and SJ]. Well, I do not mean against these values, that would be impossible, but I mean in the sense of being willing to incorporate these perspectives to practice... but as soon as you help them learn and reflect about this, and explain the historic struggle and what these [HR and SJ] involve, they start to understand what social work really is about.*

It can be argued that Spanish society, and Spanish social work and social work education have been subjected to a briefer exposure to neoliberal capitalism, and the neoliberal ideology that sustains this. Moreover, I would argue, the principles of neoliberal models of service provision (based on standards, quality assurance, consumer choice, etc.) and the value base of neoliberal ideology are rather far off Spanish traditional, family oriented, catholic values.

Key ideological notions underpinning the acceptance of neoliberal discourses among citizens and social scientists (social workers among these) include postmodernist insights that present societies as increasingly fragmented, plural, insecure and uncontrollable. In such societies, individuals' identities, values and lifestyles are modified towards a greater individualism and consumerism (Dominelli and Khan, 2000). There is ample literature indicating how the dynamics of capitalist economies, strongly supported and legitimised by mass media have impacted on people's personalities resulting in an increase of traits such as: individualism, consumerism, competitiveness, commodification of personal relationships, weakening of cohesion and cooperation networks, passivity or hedonism (Méndez Fernández et al., 2006). Thus, the same public that is deprived of their rights accepts the unified discourse that politicians and the media present; a discourse that justifies inequality presenting it as a result of personal merit, legitimises the treatment of people as market goods, and hinders by these means the defence of human rights and collective action (Méndez Fernández et al., 2006: 468).

These traits and values arguably are at odds with Spanish society's traditional values including an understanding of wellbeing as relational, an ambivalence towards wealth and prestige, the acceptance of being dependent or receiving help from family and social (often religious) networks (Tropman, 1985). However, these fit better a protestant sensitivity reflected in traditional English values which include a more individual notion of success and wellbeing, high value of self-autonomy and self-determination, a scientific approach to human problems, or a view of human beings as less engaged with their historical communities (Méndez-Bonito, 2005).

The influence of these traditional collective values in Spanish social work may help explain the open discomfort with and rejection of neoliberal ideology and practice models and a better openness and incorporation of the ideology of lead international social work organisations, including core values of social justice and broad human rights. I have discussed before how I believe radical social work Latin American influences of the profession, and the profession's relatively recent engagement with the struggles for democratic and welfare rights in the Spanish society have also contributed to the profession's ongoing perception of itself as having a role in structural change and the promotion of rights and therefore a rejection of narrower "neoliberal" models of social work education and practice. The open rejection of neoliberalism and austerity is evident in the statements and discourses of Spanish social work professional associations, and it was evident in the survey and interview data from Spanish social work educators and final year students.

## *A Positive Critique: Alternatives to neoliberal ideology in social work education*

Fairclough (2010: 2) argues that critical social research, focusing on 'understanding how and why contemporary capitalism limits human wellbeing and flourishing' can contribute to the struggles for better societies through a 'negative critique' which analyses 'how societies produce and perpetuate social wrongs' and a 'positive critique' which analyses how these are being mitigated and can be further resisted. In this research I have looked at both discourses and strategies (mostly teaching methods) of resistance to expressions of neoliberal ideology in social work education which arguably undermine human rights and social justice social work values. Strategies for teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in social work education in the two countries are explored in the next and final section of this chapter. But before moving to those, I will consider some of the discourses and underlying ideology which were drawn upon by social work educators in the two countries in order to found their teaching and justify their commitment to human rights and social justice in social work education, or to criticise oppressive social work models.

The findings from web surveys and interviews with social work educators in England pointed to the fact that there is a predominant, "narrow" neoliberal conceptualisation of social work and social work education, which poses one of the main constraints to incorporating meaningful teaching on human rights and social justice in social work education. Research data from educators and students in Spain however, identified fewer challenges for teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in social work education, and those identified were mostly of practical nature (focus in the curriculum, links theory-practice, etc.).

However, the social work educators interviewed in the two countries were openly critical of neoliberal ideology and its effects on the society and the social work profession. All of them (this was a purposive sample) referred they believed in and tried to convey through their teaching alternative models of social work (other than those shaped by neoliberal ideology) which for them embody human rights and/or social justice social work values. In both countries, social work educators' views embodied an anti-capitalist ideology, reflected in statements such as 'market needs are prioritised over people's' (England) 'politicians do not represent people' (England and Spain) 'people are exploited and dehumanised' (Spain) 'privatisation's priority is profit maximisation' (England) 'political rhetoric that privileges some groups over others' (England). Also in both countries, numerous discursual statements could be linked to a radical social work

ideology. For example: 'recognition of social causes of disadvantage'/'public causes of private pain' (Spain and England respectively) 'social workers not to just process benefits' (Spain), 'political nature of social work' 'social work fixes people to fit a capitalist system' (England). Interviewees in Spain, but not in England, drew heavily on the discourses of international social work organisations and social work codes of ethics, and on discourses related to citizenship rights and welfare state ideology.

I believe that the social work educators from the institutions in each country offer a different lesson in relation to the promotion of an ideology aligned with human rights and social justice in social work education.

Social work educators in England demonstrate that despite an adverse national context where narrow, neoliberal models of social work practice and education are widespread, groups of social work educators can develop their own ideologies and encourage according teaching practices (Watson, 1982, cited in Carey and Foster, 2011). However, as managerialism and marketization gain terrain in social work education the space for this type of resistance will probably be further constrained. The effects on social work educators' teaching practices of marketization and managerialism within social work educational institutions (in addition to managerialism of social work training standards by the government and social work employers) is an important area in relation to teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in social work education that I have not addressed and which would require further research. Foucault (1990) claimed that resistance and defiance are natural within discursive terrains, although he also highlighted that resistance in itself may not necessarily lead to wider change.

The case of Spain, where mainstream social work and social work education's ideology is strongly aligned with "social work international ethics" and seem at present rather immune to the influence of neoliberal ideology, supports Carey and Foster's argument that 'occupations such as social work can be seen as capable of producing their own self-determining ideologies that can compete with others...' Carey and Foster (2011:256) warn however, that such ideologies can also adapt, change or even disappear over time'. It has been claimed that international social work ideology's commitment with social justice and human rights provides the profession with autonomy and 'allows for the modification or refusal of illegitimate claims and mandates from society, social agencies and clients' (Wronka and Staub-Bernasconi, 2012b). 'Ultimately', Wronka and Staub-Bernasconi (2012a: 81) have suggested 'the triple mandate [to agency, the clients and the profession human rights values] could move critical or radical social work from its marginal position into the centre of social work'.



Hence, facing attempts, especially in England, to move social work's human rights and social justice principles, knowledge and aims out of social work's scope, the ideology of social work international ethics can provide social workers and social work educators with a legitimate framework from which to pursue these core social work values and deconstruct neoliberal ideology. Spanish social work professional associations and social work education offer an example of this.

### 3. Teaching, learning, and performing human rights and social justice in social work education.

The third research question of this thesis revolved around the mechanisms and teaching practices used to transmit human rights and social justice social work values to social work students in England and Spain. It also considered social work educators and social work students' experiences and views regarding these teaching practices.

I have found through the research that the teaching methods and resources social work educators from both countries use to transmit human rights and social justice to social work students are not very different. According to the four surveys and the interview data main teaching methods in these areas included in both countries: lectures, group work, involvement of service users and professionals, visual media, seminars, case studies, fieldwork activities, practice examples, promoting discussion and reflection, distance teaching, and student presentations. Social work educators tended to use and recommend a combination of teaching methods. However, in this section of the chapter I discuss in depth some of these teaching practices and areas of social work education which I have identified through the research as of particular relevance for teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in social work education. For each of these areas, I summarise findings from each country, making links with the literature and highlighting potentially transferable good practices.

#### Theory teaching in lectures

Social work educator led lectures were the most common teaching format used in both countries for teaching social work students about human rights and social justice in social work. Lectures

normally involve large groups of students; this poses limitations to the interaction amongst educators and peers, and the teaching methods and activities that can be applied. However, there are some important areas of teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in social work for which lectures are a suitable teaching space. In the web surveys of final year students, several students from each country highlighted positive experiences of learning through lectures. Interviewed social work educators from both countries gave in- depth insights on the particular ways they integrate human rights and social justice in their lectures.

Both social justice and broad human rights perspectives are broad, complex, and contested areas of social work knowledge which require an understanding of basic concepts -such as oppression, needs and rights, globalisation or social structures-, social work ethical frameworks, and, arguably, an awareness of the intellectual traditions of the human rights and social justice ideals. In the case of human rights, understanding basic human rights international and national legal frameworks, and human rights instruments is additionally required. Hence, there is a significant amount of theoretical knowledge that needs to be conveyed for social work students to understand these perspectives and how these link with social work practice.

In the surveys, social work educators from both countries mentioned a broad range of theoretical and legal frameworks used to support their teaching of human rights and social justice (see previous chapter). Reichert (2003) asserts that any social work model with a dual focus on attending to the needs of individuals (or groups) at the same time that seeking broader social change can be safely located in the terrain of human rights centred practice. There are many social work models and perspectives which the literature, including the global standards for social work education, highlight as embodying human rights and social justice (Sewpaul, 2005; Ife, 2008; Cemlyn, 2008; Reichert, 2003). These include radical, transformational or anti-oppressive social work, culturally sensitive, anti-colonialist, and empowerment based models, feminism or participatory democracy. Many of these were referred to in surveys and interviews by social work educators in both countries.

In the interviews, social work educators in England explained they taught in lectures and tended to draw in their explanations during the interviews from an elaborated critique of neoliberalism, with examples and accurate connections to social work practice and contexts. In Spain, social work educators referred frequently to history and to the ethics, statements and discourses of international social work organisations (IASSW and IFSW, 2004; IFSW and IASSW, 2014b). They discussed that they taught about the history of human rights and social justice, with a focus on citizenship perspectives. They also showed an awareness of contemporary anti-capitalist

arguments, including discourses of contemporary anti-austerity social movements in Spain, such as the 15M. Their references to these frameworks however, tended to be more theoretical and abstract. In fact, when social work students in Spain were asked if they had faced any difficulties in relation to their learning about human rights and social justice, the main area of difficulty they highlighted was a too theoretical/ abstract teaching. This was also a main area of focus in relation to their suggestions on how to improve social work students' learning about human rights and social justice, as suggestions recurrently pointed to greater links between theory and practice and more practice examples. Social work students in England did not explicitly raise any difficulties in relation to theoretical teaching, but did suggest that more support to link learning on these areas with social work practice in demanding practice contexts, and more practice examples would improve teaching and learning. Hence, helping social work students to connect theory with social work practice situations during their studies and their future social work practice would be an area which requires attention and development by social work educators in Spain.

## Teaching about history

I believe however, that historical awareness, and the continuous references to history in the teaching of social work educators in Spain is a notable strength of the interviewed social work educators in this country. Eroles (1997); Finn and Jacobson (2003a); Ife (2008); Pagaza et al. (2000) have claimed that in social work, an attention to recurring historical events and to patterns of social change can help avoiding mistakes made in the past and give reassurance about the possibility of social change. An emphasis on the importance of collective historical memory in the profession is at the core of the Latin-American radical social work *Reconceptualization* movement, which is a key influence in Spanish social work.

One of the social work educators in England asserted he did teach students about the history of social policy and social work, but implied that this was a practice outside the norm:

*... we do quite a lot of history of Social Policy and I start off with the Poor Law in Eighteen-Thirty-Four and they probably don't understand why on earth we're starting at Eighteen-Thirty-Four but I want to get them to think about the continuities in policies and how things have changed but not as much as we think perhaps about how the poor are demonised and have always been demonised in those kind of ways. And I think they eventually get it but maybe not... not initially when they come in, they think that's a bit strange what we're doing. (Interviewee 3 England)*

It is my argument that, especially in a climate where social work in England is so heavily affected by managerialism and many social workers, including students are expressing to feel oppressed by

the ideology and practices in practice contexts, the importance of a theoretical awareness about ideology and the mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism, enhanced by a historical awareness about continuity and change in the profession becomes fundamental.

## Teaching about international social work

Social work educators in Spain also appeared to give more importance and made more frequent references to teaching about international social work and social work in other countries (mostly Latin-American). Rode (2009) has highlighted how international comparative thinking and research allow for discovering differences and similarities between situations in different countries which assists explanation, helps escape from ethnocentrism, and supports learning from the pragmatic experiences of others in different countries. Interviewee 3 in England agreed with this view, although they asserted that in the UK, learning about international social work is seen as a “luxury” for which the curriculum does not allow space.

*we’ve got an awful lot to learn from international experiences of social work... from Latin America, from India, from Spain, from whatever, we should be open to learning how they do things in different ways. That would improve social workers. But I think the overarching tradition is that we just learn to... we teach people to qualify as social workers in the English framework and therefore, in that context it’s seen a bit of a... seen to be a bit of a luxury to do any sort of international or climate change or environmental type Social Work.*

Learning and teaching about international social work and social work in other countries is in my view a very important area to develop in “inward” looking social work education in England and which I will recommend (see next chapter) to integrate into teaching. For this, social work educators in England may need to increase their own international awareness and increase their knowledge about literature and practice examples from other countries.

## Promoting contact amongst students from different countries

Lalayants et al. (2015) have suggested that facilitating students’ awareness of international social work and the work of international social work organisations, and promoting collaborative working and contact amongst social work students from different countries are two teaching strategies for advancing social work human rights and social justice agenda. According to them, social work students from as diverse countries as UK, Georgia and the US showed very high levels of interest in learning about international social work and networking with students from other countries. Sims et al. (2014) have also highlighted the positive attitude towards international social work projects and new learning of UK students in relation to a series of consultation

activities around the global agenda of social work. With technological advances, this type of contact and connections can be easily established, including within the context of a large group lecture. I have personally carried out with a colleague a recent teaching activity where we connected through Skype our class of social work students with a social work class in South Africa, and with two social workers in Spain. During the session it was discussed how some case studies would be approached from each country. This session was very positively evaluated from all the groups involved, with students from UK highlighting they enjoyed the activity and learnt not only about the other countries, but also took perspective about social work in the UK, including limitations.

Moreover, this type of contact arguably fosters empathy and solidarity with students from different backgrounds and parts of the world. According to Hawkins (2009:120) knowledge about human rights issues may not lead to action or generate a sense of responsibility about this. Instead, it is 'empathy which bridges knowledge and action', triggering a desire to take action on other people's behalf (Hawkins, 2009: 125). Hawkins and Knox (2014) highlight evidence about the neurological mechanisms of empathy and how this can be promoted through educational activities that promote a better understanding of world people's experiences and cultures. They highlight the value of collaborative projects and building networks with social work student peers as means for raising a better experiential understanding of these. But empathy can also be fostered through means such as films, and internet materials exploring first person accounts of human rights and social justice issues and how these affect real people's lives (Hawkins, 2009). Many social work educators from England and Spain reported in the surveys to use audio visual materials, including films and documentaries which most probably contribute to this. Learning about human rights and social justice from films and documentaries was mentioned as a helpful learning experience by various social work students from Spain. Along these lines international social work placements were noted as by social work educators interviewed in England as most privileged place for students to get *"experience of different perspectives, in the way that different people live, and the conditions that people are forced to live in, this opens people's eyes, and it's pretty much live changing..."* (Interviewee 1 England).

## Including service users' experiences and perspectives

Service users' experiential accounts and knowledge arguably become another key way for promoting empathy and cultural awareness of human rights and social justice issues. Moreover, it is argued that a critical social work for social justice needs to promote a democratisation of social work knowledge in collaboration with service users and sensitive to local cultures (Beresford and

Croft, 2004; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2006; Ife, 2008; Dominelli, 2010). According to the literature and research data, service user involvement is commonly integrated in social work training in both countries, although a 36 % of social work students in Spain asserted they had not been taught by service users. Service user involvement is an important and complex area which this research has not explored in depth. In my MA dissertation (Martinez-Herrero, 2011), I conducted a literature review of service user involvement in social work education in the UK, from which I learned that achieving meaningful and empowering involvement is a possible and very important but challenging task with requires much sensitivity and attention. Indeed, I believe that in cultural and socio-political climates in England and Spain where racism and victimisation of the poor and vulnerable are on the rise, teaching methods that allow social work students to overcome cultural barriers and prejudice and develop human rights responsibility, empathy and solidarity, become fundamental in social work education.

### Facilitating deep, holistic, and politically informed understanding of social problems

Dominelli (2010) and Ife (2008; 2001) highlight the importance for a human rights and social justice based social work of engaging with social work models that connect local and global contexts. This, they argue, requires holistic and deep understandings of the world, including the deepest roots of service users' problems. Such holistic understanding of the world also requires to establish links between the personal and political at the different levels of governance (Ife, 2001, 2008). This has implications for teaching as social work students need to be able to understand those links and connections. Interviewee social work educators from both countries made deep links between the personal social problems and the political, when discussing issues such as unemployment, austerity, racism or disability. A dual focus on local and global contexts was particularly clear in the holistic analysis and understanding of interviewee social work educators in Spain.

Interviewee social work educators from the two countries saw a role of social workers in criticising and denouncing social injustice and social problems of a political origin. However, it has been discussed in a previous section how this appears to be a common understanding in Spain (legitimated by social work ethics) but a contested and perhaps minority understanding of human rights and social justice in social work education in England.

## Supporting students' collective action

Ferguson and Lavalette (2006: 312) call social workers to develop 'a social work of resistance and possibility' facing the pressures of neoliberalism in the UK. O'Brien (2011) (from New Zealand) indicates that the responsibility for social workers' social justice struggles cannot be placed only on individual social workers who are subjected to many sources of pressure, highlighting the need for professional social justice oriented collective action. Sources of pressure for not 'speaking up' (against malpractice or oppressive action) include political links of organisations or dependence of government funding, stressing or insecure working conditions, bureaucratic working models, or social justice and human needs being seen as technical rather than socio-political problems in their practice contexts (Preston-Shoot and Höjer, 2012: 19).

Hence, social work students arguably need to be introduced to collective action and activism models and perspectives so they are equipped to defend the rights of service users, of themselves as social workers, and the social work profession against political interests and other sources of oppression. Palumbo and Friedman (2014) and Dudziak (2005) have documented their experiences in supporting social work students to engage with activism and their reflections in relation to their roles and identities as both political activists and social work academics, highlighting converging values and perspectives but also their experiences of contradictions and tensions. Survey data shows that many social work educators and some social work students in both countries have had experiences of activism and collective action, hence these are arguably topics and experiences to bring up in teaching about rights and justice. Promoting student's social activism and participation in social movements was mentioned as a helpful learning experience about human rights and social justice by one social work educator in Spain and two students in this country. Learning techniques for social mobilization was suggested by one social work student in Spain as a way of improving student learning on human rights and social justice in social work. Collective action is not mentioned in the surveys in England, but the importance for social work educators and students to engage with activism outside University and practice contexts in order to defend the social work profession and service users was noted by two of the three interviewees in England. In both countries but especially in England, the efforts to defend and promote a broad conception of social work inclusive of human rights and social justice aims and values against advancement of narrower neoliberal models of social work may require collective action of students and educators outside the educational context.

## Human rights and social justice oriented activities outside educational contexts

The key role in promoting human rights and social justice of activities and interaction between educators, students, professionals and service users outside the university was clearly highlighted by social work educators in the two countries during the interviews. One of the educators in Spain discussed the value of “immersion” experiences carried out from the department where social work students make a parenthesis in their normal lives and live within disadvantaged communities for a short but intensive period of time where they get in contact and share experiences with the people in the communities and the professionals working in these. Another educator in Spain highlighted the importance they saw in fieldwork visits and trips where bureaucracy of public administration and professional activities can be demystified. This and the other educators in Spain also insisted in the importance of encouraging students to put themselves “in the shoes” of service users in order to become good professionals.

In the surveys, several social work educators in Spain asserted that greater student independent involvement and contact with social realities of service users would improve their learning about human rights and social justice. This led me to conclude that social work, in this University and probably more broadly in Spain, is seen as a moral activity where close (yet professional) relationships with service users are valued, taught about and encouraged.

## Practice learning

Practice learning during social work studies was noted as the most important teaching activity for learning about human rights and social justice by social work students in England (they also suggested that more support in linking theory and practice would be beneficial). However, practice learning contexts were noted as an area of concern or challenging spaces by some social work educators in England in the surveys due to a limited alignment of agencies’ working models with human rights and social justice, and by all the interviewees in this country. Literature on managerialism, which largely characterises many social work practice contexts and particularly statutory social work in the UK, has been discussed before.

Interviewee 3 England

*in the world of practice, I think that’s an experience in terms of managerialism, so increasing workloads, control by computers, an attempt to restrict the freedom of street level bureaucrats to have discretion about money payments, the work that they do to try and control all of that, to restrict, you know ...restrict the autonomy of professional social workers.*



## Interviewee 2 England

*in our teaching in the classroom we are talking about kind of working alongside people, understanding those power dynamics within professional practice in order to challenge them, in order to work alongside people in ways that don't reinforce the oppression that people experience and so on. But the institutions within which social workers work often make that difficult in a day to day practice sense. So I think it's interesting for students to both have the experience of being on placement and the power relationships between themselves and service users but then to be involved in a campaigning space where the power relationships are different.*

In Spain, nevertheless, practice learning was considered by the interviewed social work educators one of the main spaces for learning about human rights and social justice in social work. They saw this as a space that allows students to 'put themselves in the service users' shoes' (interviewee 4 Spain) and 'see' (interviewee 1 Spain) and better understand the links between social work, social justice and human rights. However, in the surveys the number of students in Spain who highlighted placement experiences as helpful for their learning about human rights and social justice was small. In my view, this relates to the above discussed traditional difficulties found by social work students in making links between what is often seen as an "abstract" or "too theoretical" (quotes from students' responses) knowledge base acquired at University and the situations encountered in their placements and future social work practice. I believe that improving practice learning experiences in Spain by reinforcing the support given to students to connect theory and practice would result in an enhanced understanding and implementation of the social work values of social justice and human rights. And that the identification of social work educators in Spain of practice experiences as a main place for teaching and learning about these, is a positive necessary step that would facilitate courses willingness' to invest efforts in improving the quality of practice learning.

Raising practice learning standards has been an area of focus as part of the recent and ongoing national developments of the social work curriculum in Spain. The Association of Social Work Directors of the Spanish Universities [Conferencia de Directores de Trabajo Social] (CDTS, 2013: 99) 'has developed different activities in the last years with the purpose to ameliorate the development and management of practical work (field placements)'. These activities included so far a survey aimed to gather data of how placements are organized and managed in the different Spanish Universities, a conference to reflect on these findings and decide future lines of action, and the development of a guidance document which includes national recommendations and quality standards for the field placements in the Social Work Degrees in Spain (CDTS, 2013). These efforts, assisted by social work educators' recognition of practice learning as a very important part

of social work training in Spain can be expected to result in enhanced opportunities for improving placement experiences in social work education in Spain. Drawing from these research findings, I believe that improving links between theory and practice should be at the core of these efforts.

## Modelling human rights and social justice social work values

I agree with Ife (2008) and Méndez Fernández et al. (2006)'s claim that means and ends cannot be separated in a social work education and practice committed to and respectful of human rights and social justice. Apart from teaching about interventions aimed at achieving human rights, it is as important that social work courses operate in ways that uphold human rights and social justice (Ife, 2008; Sewpaul and Jones, 2005), and that social work educators model human rights through educational styles, attitudes and practices consistent with these. According to Méndez Fernández et al. (2006), this involves sharing power with students.

Social work final year students were asked if they thought their social work educators (academic staff and practice educators) were good role models for ethical social work practice. With only a very small minority in each country asserting that none of them were good role models, their opinions about their academic staff and practice educators tended to be split between asserting that some of them and that all of them were good role models. An exception was the view of Spanish final year students of academic staff, with about 75% asserting some of the academic staff were good role models and 25% asserting all of them were. However, these data combined can be interpreted rather positively, highlighting that the students from both countries were able to identify good role models of ethical social work practice amongst their academic teaching staff and practice educators. In their qualitative comments expanding on their views about this, it is clear that they valued this as very important and were very grateful, motivated and encouraged by the educators they considered good role models to carrying out themselves an ethical social work practice. Negative comments tended to relate to educators not listening to students, favouring some students, not being honest about their real views or on the other extreme trying to impose these. The importance of honest discussions was highlighted as a main issue in relation to their consideration of teaching staff being or not being good role models of ethical practice.

Other areas where courses can according to the literature (notably the global standards (Sewpaul and Jones, 2005) uphold or contradict human rights and social justice social work values include student choice, individualised and empowering support, non-discrimination and valuing and promoting diversity. Around 25-30% of students in both countries asserted to not feel free or only feel moderately free to express their views in their social work courses, with the remaining 70-

75% asserting to feel quite or very free in this regard. In terms of their academic work and practice learning, students in England reported lower levels of choice than students in Spain. Over 80% of students in Spain however, reported not being aware of any mechanisms to safeguard students against discrimination in their institutions versus 52% in England reporting this, and amongst those who reported being aware of these, students in England tended to evaluate these as being effective to a greater extent than the students aware of these in Spain. Students in Spain reported lower levels of cultural and ethnic diversity amongst the staff and student groups in their institutions, and scored lower when asked about the extent to which they value diversity amongst these groups.

In relation to modelling social work values, and to developing meaningful interactions with social work students, in my view, social work educators in Spain tended to see the spaces within and outside the University as complementary and intertwined. Emotional involvement and personal commitment to human rights and social justice causes of both educators and students beyond the educational contexts was seen as an extended part of social work professionalism, and a desired goal to seek to achieve in social work education. For example, interviewee 1 in Spain asserted that she conveys students the message “that human rights involve them not only as professionals, but also as persons”. Along similar lines, Interviewee 2 in Spain claimed that “social workers are co-responsible of the communities we form part, as citizens as well as social workers”. This is perhaps even more clear in the words of interviewee 3 who mentioned that:

*Something that I ask them [students] often, when there is something on the news related to the module, with human rights, with social justice, I ask them if they watched the news, and whether they talk about this with their university peers when they are outside the classroom, if they talk about this with their families, in their leisure time, or when they are having a drink*

In England however, where social work education is highly controlled by the government and required to fulfil specific models of professionalism, the spaces within and outside the social work courses appear to be perceived according to the interviewees as offering different opportunities for social work educators to model human rights and social justice values and partnership work with social work students and service users. This is clearly expressed by interviewee 2 in England:

*I think it is in those kind of spaces [activist groups outside University] in which you can really consider what we mean by social work for social justice. So what kind of relationships. Firstly, what that space does -this is a campaign led by service users in which social workers and social work students and educators are allies of service users and campaign alongside, so this is a kind of embodiment of a different kind of relationship to the classic power relationship between the*

*professional and the service user. So I think it's interesting for students to both have the experience of being on placement and the power relationships between themselves and service users but then to be involved in a campaigning space where the power relationships are different. So I think this helps to embed some of the teaching we are doing and some of the ways by which service users are conceptualised by students so I think it's a very interesting space and a very important space...*

## Creating spaces for discussion and reflection

A final area of teaching about human rights and social justice in social work education where the literature resonates with the views of participants in this research, relates to the importance of creating safe spaces for discussion, reflection, and emotional engagement with students. This is in order to empower them to reflect on their own lives, and promote their personal development for a human rights and social justice engagement (Méndez Fernández et al., 2006). Poole (2010: 2-3) noted that social work students need to be supported to become aware of their positioning in society and the barriers they may experience in engaging with this type of social work (for human rights and social justice) so they can “hold on to [these out there in a postwelfare world and ‘in social work organisations run under neoliberal management models’]. Barriers for this identified by Wehbi and Straka (2010) include internal barriers such as internalised oppression, fears, lack of a belief in change, shame, stereotypes or burnout. Supportive factors included critical reflection, self-care, personal values, awareness of power and supportive networks. Discussion around these personal and emotional topics arguably requires social work educators to build safe environments for critical self-reflection, emotional engagement and honest discussion (Bransford, 2011). Small group seminars and group work, seem to me the perfect spaces for these activities, which can be supported by group work creative activities, and techniques and materials for promoting honest discussion.

Resistance from students (emotional, ideological, etc.) to engage with human rights and social justice topics was noted as one of the main difficulties in teaching human rights and social justice in the surveys of social work educators in both countries. Promoting discussion and debates, and challenging views were also noted in the social work educators' surveys and to a lesser extent in the social work students' surveys in both countries as best ways of teaching/helpful learning experiences on these areas. More space for debate and discussion was a repeated suggestion in surveys of social work students and by one social work educators in England to improve teaching in these areas. One student in Spain suggested more interaction between educators and student would help improve this. The ‘transformational aspect of social work education’ (Interviewee 2 England) whereby social work students gain new worldviews which change them personally was

noted by most social work educators in the two countries. Hence, personal support and spaces for self-reflection and honest discussion gain a great importance during the educational process.

One of the interviewees in England and another in Spain discussed how they found discussion with students a meaningful way for helping them understand how real life issues link with human rights and social justice values.

#### Interviewee 1 England

*[Small group discussion] enables people to feel quite comfy to say things that are on their mind and for us to be able to debate and you know, we talk a lot about anti-oppressive practice and people can speak out, but unless you create the conditions where people can really explore what that means and how they pan that in practice, and how that feels for them then I think all you get is the kind of formulae stuff that's from the textbook and you don't have social workers that can really then implement what they believe, or really understand what they believe.*

## Conclusion

In this core chapter of the thesis I have drawn together survey and qualitative interview data and interpreted these in the light of the literature. The chapter has offered a thematic discussion of findings and addressed research questions. In the next and concluding chapter of the thesis I will summarise the research findings and make recommendations for social work educators to develop HR and SJ informed teaching practices that in turn will enhance human rights and social justice informed social work practice.

# CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Introduction

In this conclusion chapter, I offer a summary of the research design, main findings and recommendations to support social work educators to embed human rights and social justice in their teaching practices. I then consider limitations and strengths of the research. Finally, I highlight the original contribution to knowledge and indicate suggestions for future research.

By offering recommendations for social work educators, I address in the chapter the fourth and final research question: “What could help social work educators operationalize the commitment to the values of human rights and social justice embodied in the Global Standards for social work education? What lessons can be learned from educational practices in these different cultural contexts?”

## Summary of the research design

In this thesis I set out to explore how human rights and social justice knowledge and values are conveyed in social work education in England and Spain, intrigued by my experience as a social work student in the two countries, and concerned about what I perceived as serious challenges to human rights and social justice oriented social work in both countries. These were challenges to social work, including social work education, posed by the global socioeconomic crisis and widespread austerity responses from governments in these two European countries, and throughout the world. I believed that human rights and social justice, two core social work values, embodied in the statements and agendas of organisations of international influence for social work, such as the IFSW, the IASSW and the ICSW, were an appropriate pivotal focus point from which to explore and develop a critical understanding of social work education in the two countries. My aim was to contribute to current debates in the profession and to promote a social work of resistance to neoliberal globalisation and the impact this has had on those who use social work services, professional social workers and social work educators in England and Spain.

The research questions evolved alongside my increasing knowledge and understanding of the complexities of the core concepts: human rights and social justice and focused on: 1) the differential understandings of human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain, 2) the mechanisms used to transmit these to social work students in the two countries, 3) the underlying ideologies and political agendas shaping social work education in England and Spain, 4) lessons that can be learned to support social work educators to embed human rights and social justice in their teaching practices.

To address the research questions, I used a) a web survey of social work educators and final year social work students of undergraduate and postgraduate social work courses, and b) qualitative interviews with social work educators from one University in each country. These institutions were selected for their overt commitment to a HR/SJ based social work education.

Comparing social work education in the two countries required a balance between nuance and breadth. I chose critical realism as the methodological framework to provide rational explanations of the differential patterns found in each country. In order to build these explanations, I interpreted the research findings in the light of current debates on human rights and social justice, and the historical contexts of social work education, in England and Spain.

As a “critical” methodology, critical realism implies a commitment to human emancipation from oppression. From a critical perspective, theory, values and politics cannot be separated from research evidence as these become ‘critical contextual features’ of the research process and are ‘intertwined with knowledge claims’ (Soydan, 2010: 131). While critical realism has not been traditionally characterised by reflexivity, I considered it fundamental for this research project to address my subjectivity throughout, an approach supported by Nightingale and Cromby (2002) and Archer (2010). From the start I acknowledge my own standpoint including my insider/outsider experiences of social work education in England and Spain, my personal commitment to social justice values and progressive politics, my catholic influenced value base and cultural background.



## Summary of findings and recommendations

### Understandings of human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain

The first objective of the research was to explore the understandings of human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain. The corresponding first research question was formulated as “what are the understandings of human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain?”.

Here I found several differences. Human rights and social justice in England were largely understood by social work educators as separate concepts and areas of knowledge. Understanding of human rights amongst social work educators tended to be legalistic and focused on the individual “1<sup>st</sup> generation” rights enshrined in the Human Rights Act 1998. Social workers’ roles in relation to human rights were understood as complying with statutory human rights and legal responsibilities towards service users. In Spain however, human rights and social justice were seen by social work educators more holistically as a continuum, or separate but intrinsically linked concepts including individual and collective rights outlined in the UNDHR. Human rights responsibilities were seen as shared by governments, civil society and professions, with social work having a particular responsibility to contribute to human rights struggles consistent with the profession’s mission, as set out in the global definition of social work.

In relation to social justice, in England I found a range of views, from a narrow understanding of social justice “as helping those on the margins of society” (CSJ, 2015:3) without considering structural dimensions of social problems, and more radical understandings focusing on “public causes of private pain” (Int. 3 England). By contrast, participants in Spain, appeared to be fully aware and engaged with structural, activist and preventive/developmental dimensions of social justice.

### Ideology and political agendas informing social work education in England and Spain

A second objective of the research was to explore, from a critical theory perspective, the role of ideology and the political agendas informing human rights and social justice in England and Spain. The corresponding research questions were formulated as “what are the main characteristics of social work education’s contexts in England and Spain –including underlying ideologies and

political agendas?” and “how do these impact teaching and learning about human rights and social justice in social work?”

Contemporary and historical political agendas in relation to the social work profession have been discussed throughout the thesis and revisited in chapter seven. In relation to Spain, I highlighted how the social work profession was intertwined with the Catholic Church and embodied some of its roles in enforcing the ideology of the Francoist dictatorial regime. In the case of England, I outlined repeated drives by central government to reform and deprofessionalise social work.

Regarding the ideology affecting social work education in the two countries, I argued that there are two main ideologies currently shaping social work education in both countries: neoliberalism and the ideology represented by the human rights and social justice agenda embodied by the profession’s codes of ethics worldwide (Banks, 2006), the IFSW and other organisations of international influence in social work. I have referred to this “ideology” as “social work (international) ethics”. In critical realist terms, these two ideologies can be considered causal mechanisms influencing understandings of human rights and social justice and teaching practices in social work education. A third identified causal mechanism affecting understandings of human rights and social justice was culture: the norms, beliefs and values of social work educational systems in the two countries and broader national cultural patterns. Mechanisms of a cultural nature contribute to the shaping of the understandings and teaching practices related to human rights and social justice in social work education, and they modulate the expressions and effects of neoliberal ideology and the ideology of social work ethics in each country. Neoliberal ideology and the ideology of social work international ethics are, I argue, contradictory and held in tension; as one gains acceptance in the profession, the other becomes less influential.

I argue that neoliberal ideology has had a powerful impact on social work education in England and a more moderate impact in Spain, while the influence of social work international ethics has remained stronger in Spain than England. The research has documented how, according to the literature and research participants, mainstream social work in England becomes increasingly oppressive and embraces neoliberalism whereas in Spain the profession and social work educators openly claim to seek to resist neoliberalism, and see the profession as responsible for advancing opposing human rights and social justice struggles.

As Ferguson (2008:12) has articulated, neoliberal ideology is “not the only show in town”. An alternative ideology based on human rights and social justice and legitimated by social work codes of ethics and international social work can be drawn upon, reclaimed and advanced.

## Teaching, learning and performing human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain

Two further objectives of the research were a) to explore the mechanisms used to convey human rights and social justice knowledge and values to social work students in England and Spain, and b) to develop a series of recommendations to support social work educators to embed human rights and social justice in their everyday teaching practices. The formulation of corresponding research questions was: a) “What mechanisms and teaching practices are used to convey understandings of human rights and social justice to social work students in England and Spain? And what are social work educators’ and social work students’ experiences of these?”; b) “What could help social work educators operationalize the commitment to the values of human rights and social justice embodied in the Global Standards for social work education?” and “What lessons can be learned from educational practise in these culturally contrasting European countries?”

I identified a series of teaching practices of particular significance for conveying human rights and social justice knowledge and values to social work students. These are outlined below together with key recommendations.

### Theory teaching in lectures

Lectures were the most common teaching format in both countries, where social work educators taught students about theories related to human rights and social justice with relevance for social work. Educators from the two countries identified a broad range of theoretical and legal frameworks used in their teaching on these areas. Noted theories included those related to radical and anti-oppressive social work, empowerment based practice models or participatory democracy.

Facilitating deep, holistic and politically informed understandings of social problems is highlighted in the literature fundamental in teaching students about broad human rights and social justice (Ife, 2008; Dominelli, 2010). The social work educators interviewed in the two countries referred to these types of theoretical frameworks, characterised by holistic analysis and attention to deep social structures and power relations, such as Marxist/anti-capitalist frameworks. However, social work educators in England made frequent explicit links with social work contexts of practice or real life situations, providing detailed examples whereas the analysis of social work educators in Spain tended to be more abstract. Difficulties in understanding abstract concepts and in linking

theory and practice were highlighted by social work students in Spain as a barrier for learning about human rights and social justice. Hence, I **recommend** social work educators in Spain to focus on helping social work students understand the connections between abstract theory and social work practice realities. For example, using case studies, practice examples, and group discussions of complex topics are amongst the teaching practices suggested by students in Spain as helpful for their learning about human rights and social justice, and which could help them in understanding the links between theory and practice.

### Teaching about history

Social work educators in Spain referred to the importance of history in their teaching whereas social work educators in England suggested their teaching focused on present social work contexts. I argue that theoretical awareness about the ideology and mechanisms of neoliberalism, enhanced by a historical awareness about change and continuing patterns in the profession, allows for a more critical understanding of current contexts of practice and the possibilities for change. Hence, I **recommend** social work educators in England to include relevant references to history in their teaching as a means of assisting the development of critical awareness of current contexts and possibilities for change in the social work profession.

### Teaching about international social work, and promoting students' international collaboration, empathy and solidarity.

Social work educators in England appreciated the potential value of international perspectives and collaborations but acknowledged the compulsory curriculum did not prioritise this, allowing little space. Social work educators in Spain, however, tended to give more importance to teaching about international social work and social work in other countries. I **recommend** social work educators in both countries but particularly in England to aim to promote amongst social work students an awareness of international social work, and international social work organisations and their ethics frameworks where these values are at the core. Increasing social work educators' own interest and knowledge about literature and practice examples from other countries may be a necessary first step. Nevertheless, Hawkins (2009:125) has indicated that it is not knowledge but 'empathy which bridges knowledge and action' in relation to human rights and social justice issues, highlighting the possibilities and importance of promoting empathy with people from other cultures amongst social work students. Technology assisted collaborative work amongst students from different countries, use of audio visual materials showing the perspectives of people from other cultures, and seeking international placements and exchanges are suggested

ways of promoting cultural sensitivity, empathy and solidarity in relation to the social justice and human rights values and aims of social work.

### Including service users' experiences and perspectives

Linked to the above point, I argue that providing social work students with the opportunity to listen to service users' perspectives and their experiences in relation to human rights and social (in) justice is a means for helping students overcome prejudice and foster empathy and solidarity. But service user involvement in social work education is also fundamental for the recognition of service users' experiential knowledge. The democratisation of social work knowledge is arguably a core requirement of a critical, human rights and social justice based social work. Whereas this is not an area that this research has explored in depth, a broad **recommendation** for social work educators in both countries is to ensure the promotion of meaningful (non-tokenistic) service user involvement in their teaching in order to fulfil human rights social work values which, I argue, includes valuing and facilitating social work service users' participation and contribution to social work knowledge.

### Supporting students' collective action

The research data showed that many social work educators and some final year students in both countries have had experiences of activism for human rights /social justice issues. Facing current and unpredictable future political constraints to the profession and other sources of oppression, social work students must be equipped to defend the rights of service users, and resist threats to themselves as professional social workers, and the social work profession as a whole. I therefore **recommend** that experiences of activism of educators and students are drawn upon in teaching, and that students are introduced to models and techniques of collective action, emphasising their legitimacy within a broad conception of social work along the lines of the Social work definition of the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW and IASSW, 2014).

### Practice learning and human rights and social justice oriented activities outside higher educational institutions

Practice learning in the social work course was highlighted by social work educators in Spain and by students in both countries as a fundamental activity in learning about human rights and social justice. However, social work educators in England pointed to practice learning as an area of potential concern given a frequent lack of alignment of agencies' working models with social work

human rights and social justice values (in statutory social work in particular). In relation to these concerns, the educators interviewed in England highlighted the important role in promoting human rights and social justice social work values through activities outside the University where social work educators, students, professionals and service users can work together, sharing experiences and power.

By contrast, the interviewed social work educators in Spain tended to see the spaces within and outside the University as complementary and intertwined. Emotional involvement and personal commitment to human rights and social justice causes, of both educators and students, beyond the educational context was seen as an extended part of social work professionalism, and a desired goal of social work education.

Student learning about human rights and social justice with the support of social work educators through activities outside the University such as field trips, volunteering, activist activities, or conference attendance was very highly valued by social work educators and students in both countries and hence an area I **recommend** to promote and take advantage of in social work education.

### Modelling human rights and social justice values

I have highlighted the importance for social work educators and programmes to model social work human rights and social justice values, in line with the recommendations in the Global standards for social work education (Sewpaul and Jones, 2005). This implies attention to student choice, individualised and empowering support, non-discrimination and valuing and promoting diversity. I found that the students from both countries were able to identify positive role models of ethical social work practice amongst their academic teaching staff and practice educators, and this was something they valued in building their own commitment to a human rights and social justice based social work practice. Students highlighted in particular the value of social work educators' honesty, whereas negative comments tended to relate to educators not listening to students, favouring some students, not being honest about their real views or on the other extreme trying to impose these. Another noteworthy finding was that students in Spain attributed lower value to diversity than students in England. Developing and promoting social work students' sensitivity towards diversity is therefore an area to be explored in social work education in Spain.

## Creating safe spaces for discussion and reflection

Finally, promoting discussion and debates, and challenging views were noted by social work educators and final year students in both countries as the best ways of learning and teaching about human rights and social justice. Developing a readiness for applying related knowledge and values to social work practice involves personal and emotional engagement and development. Facilitating critical self-reflection, emotional engagement and honest discussion in this regard requires social work educators to build safe environments. Seminars and group work involving small numbers of students seem to me the most appropriate spaces for these activities, which can be supported by group work activities and techniques for promoting honest discussion.

## Limitations of the research

This research has a number of limitations that must be born in mind by the reader. Critical realism relies on the researcher's rational and intuitive identification of causal mechanisms and subsequent explanations of the patterns found in the research data. For example, when considering the underlying ideologies impacting understandings and teaching practices in relation to human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain, I identified the influences of neoliberal ideology, social work's international code of ethics, and culture in explaining the differential patterns found between the two countries. Another researcher, however, could propose an alternative configuration of main causal mechanisms of the patterns observed and a different interpretation of the findings which might offer greater explanatory power for empirical observations. As this study is, to my knowledge, the first empirical study comparing human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain, I can only claim that my analysis and interpretation of findings offer initial and tentative findings and explanations, that must be treated with caution. Generalising and building a holistic picture from the data and literature available to me, proved to be a challenging process. I had to consciously forego discussion of some of the research data and of some of the complexities in relation to the research topic, in order to create clear explanations and an overall coherent argument.

The specific research methods used: namely web surveys and interviews have their own limitations and challenges which were discussed in chapter five. But I have also had to learn a number of lessons about the conduct of a research project within a defined period of time. The

most notable was my underestimation of the workload and amount of resulting data involved in my original research design where I aimed to carry out one or more case studies in each country in addition to web surveys. As explained in the thesis, this was a task I had to reduce very significantly during the research. I have also discussed how, at the point of designing the research and web surveys, I had not anticipated finding very differential understandings of the concepts of human rights and social justice by social work educators and students in England and Spain. Rather, I discovered these during the data collection and interpretation of findings. Linked to this, I also came to the realisation that my survey design was better aligned with the understandings of human rights and social justice of social work educators and students from Spain than those from England.

## Strengths of the research

Despite these limitations, I believe this research has several areas of strength. The first of these is its strong philosophical and methodological grounding. Understanding and applying critical realism has been a challenge but has allowed me to manage the broad scope of this research and to produce a sound holistic, yet deep interpretation of findings in relation to the research questions.

Other sources of strength are the historical awareness achieved in relation to the research topic and the contexts of the research, my international comparative thinking, and the insights from reflexivity on my own experiences as an insider and outsider in these two educational contexts. I believe that the combination of these three characteristics have enhanced my retroductive thinking (explanations searching), my ideas generation, and my creative yet rational thinking in this research.

One final area of strength lies in the transparency of the research process throughout. I have made myself visible in the text, acknowledged my stand point in relation to the research and provided thick description of the research process and the rationale for decision making during the research.



## Original contributions

This research responds to, and advances, knowledge in relation to a relevant topic for contemporary social work. The place of human rights and social justice in social work and social work education is at the core of contemporary debates in the profession and in the social work literature in England, in Spain and globally. Yet the literature considering everyday teaching practices used by social work educators to help social work students to learn about human rights and social justice is scant. This study of the multilevel implications of human rights and social justice in social work education is, to my knowledge, the first such study in England and Spain, having a potential impact on audiences in both countries and in the global social work community. In this way it makes an original contribution to knowledge about the role of social work education in imparting the values of a global profession in two contrasting European countries at a particular period in history.

The study also makes a valuable methodological contribution through the use of critical realism as a methodological framework in this field of study. Critical realism is an underdeveloped methodology in social work research (Craig and Bigby, 2015; Oliver, 2011); and this comparative study of social work education contributes to a wider understanding of this potentially fruitful methodology in social work research.

A third original contribution arises from my position as a qualified social worker with a working knowledge of the two countries that are the focus of study in this thesis. This also offers a rare opportunity for dissemination of the findings to national and international audiences in Spanish and in English. I have sought through this research, and will continue to seek, to make the most of this position in order to make a continuing contribution to social work knowledge.

## Reflections on learning

I have learned and developed greatly as a social researcher through the experience of conducting this research under the educational framework of a PhD research programme and most notably with the invaluable help of supervisors' support. I now feel ready and look forward to continuing my research career as a more autonomous social work researcher. This research has also had a very personal and fulfilling component, having helped me make sense of my experiences in relation to this research topic. I now feel equipped with knowledge that will assist me to resist

neoliberal pressures that threaten human rights and social justice based social work. And the comparative nature of this research, involving engagement in different cultural and political settings, leaves me with greater confidence to use this knowledge, both in my current position as a social work educator in England and in similar roles in different settings in the future.

## Areas for further research and final concluding notes

This research has sought to identify broad comparative patterns in relation to i) understandings of human rights and social justice in social work education in England and Spain, ii) underlying ideologies and political agendas impacting social work education in these countries, and iii) teaching practices used by social work educators to convey human rights and social justice knowledge and values to social work students in the two countries. However, this has been a holistic, exploratory study with broad scope and the findings have opened doors for further, more focused research in each of these countries in relation to various sub-themes covered in the research. This could include further research in the following areas:

- service user involvement in social work education, especially in Spain where this does not appear to be as generalised as in England;
- the development and evaluation of models/tools for enhancing teaching about human rights and social justice in social work education;
- the marketisation of social work education and how this influences the possibilities of social work educators in teaching, performing and modelling human rights and social justice social work knowledge and values in social work courses.

The exploratory nature of this research also means that it would benefit from a further stage of validation by social work educators and students in each country. Hence, my next planned stage is to disseminate the research findings and seek feedback from stakeholders (social work educators and students) in the two countries. This will result in more robust and refined knowledge from this research project.

While I have considered the broader contexts of social work education in England and Spain, including underlying ideologies and political agendas, the recommendations from this research focus on practices that social work educators can include in their daily teaching in order to advance students' understanding of human rights knowledge and values, and their application in

practice. But these recommendations mainly apply to the possibilities of teaching and learning about human rights and social justice within the status quo of social work education in the two countries. As the extension of neoliberal agendas in relation to social work education advance in both countries, and facing political and social uncertainty, challenging the status quo becomes even more important for social work educators in both countries.

I have discussed how, in England, neoliberal agendas are continuously pressing to narrow the social work terrain and knowledge and value base (involving a backlash against social work human rights and social justice values), driving the deprofessionalisation of social work education through the promotion of fast-track employment based routes to social work qualification. Beyond opportunities for strengthening teaching practices, the role of social work academics in articulating and defending the importance of social work as an international profession and academic discipline, with a globally shared value base with human rights and social justice at the core, becomes ever more important. And at a time of increased hostility to migrant workers and refugees following the Brexit vote, and the advance of political agendas promoting stricter immigration control and undermining the Human Rights Act, strengthening international links and the identity of social work as a profession becomes yet more important.

In the case of Spain, in a period marked by the consequences of years of economic crisis and draconian austerity, and more recently a crisis of governance which seems set to lead to the continuing power of right wing political parties in the country, the social work profession, and social work educators will continue to have a key role in challenging neoliberalism and promoting human rights and social justice struggles, based on the profession's values.

# ANNEX 1: RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: STUDENT SURVEYS



Annex 1 student  
survey questions tak

# ANNEX 2: WEB SURVEYS

The four web surveys used in the research, as well as recruitment, information and consent materials are attached next.

## 1. Web survey of social work educators in England



Survey of Social Work Educators England.pdf

## 2. Web survey of final year students in England



Survey of Social Work FY Students England.pdf

## 3. Web survey of social work educators in Spain



Survey of Social Work Educators Spain.pdf

## 4. Web survey of final year social work students in Spain



Survey of Social Work FY Students Spain.pdf

## 5. Contact emails social work educators in England

**Web surveys information sheet English**

**Web surveys information sheet Spanish**



Web surveys contact emails and info sheets.pdf

## 6. Bilingual research poster



HR and SJ poster presented at SWSD Stockholm2012.pdf

# ANNEX 3: INTERVIEWS

The following interview materials are next attached:

- 1. Contact email interviewees England**
- 2. Interviews' information sheet and consent form English.**
- 3. Interview plan English.**
- 4. Contact email interviewees Spain**
- 5. Interviews' information sheet and consent form Spanish**
- 6. Interview plan Spanish**



Annex 3 interview documents.pdf

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